

**MARSILIO FICINO:
HIS THEOLOGY,
HIS PHILOSOPHY,
HIS LEGACY**



edited by

MICHAEL J.B. ALLEN

AND

VALERY REES

WITH MARTIN DAVIES

BRILL

**MARSILIO FICINO:
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The idea for this book arose out of a conference held in June 1999 at the National Gallery in London under the auspices of the Society for Renaissance Studies. That occasion marked a high point in a series of events across Europe held in honour of the Quincentenary of Ficino's death. It also, sadly, marked the passing on 7th June 1999 of Professor Paul Oskar Kristeller, doyen of Ficino studies. The conference began with a dedication in tribute to his learned and generous scholarship over six decades—a period exactly mirroring Ficino's lifetime 500 years earlier—and speakers acknowledged in many ways their indebtedness to his wide-ranging, pioneering work.

Over 350 participants came to listen to the two days of papers on the theme of *Marsilio Ficino: his Sources, his Circle, his Legacy*, bearing witness to the fact that interest in this Florentine scholar has reached an audience far wider than is usual for Renaissance philosophers. An exhibition of recent paintings inspired by Ficino's fables added to the attractions, as did the special dedication of a performance of *Julius Caesar* at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, where the Artistic Director, Mark Rylance, spoke eloquently on Ficino's contribution to his own understanding of Renaissance drama.

Two thirds of this volume's authors were speakers at the conference. As the intervening two years have allowed time for reflection on the discussions that took place, all of their papers have been extensively revised. The other third were either present in the audience or were invited subsequently to participate in the volume. It is particularly gratifying to note that half the papers come from scholars in the earlier stages of their academic careers.

Thanks were expressed at the time to all those individuals and institutions whose efforts and generosity contributed to the conference's success. It is now appropriate to thank some of the same people for their continued support, and also others who have facilitated the publication of this volume. The first word of thanks must go to Martin Davies for undertaking the Herculean task of detailed checking and correction in the final stages of the preparation of the typescript. Special debts are also owed to successive chairmen of the Society for Renaissance Studies, Francis Ames-Lewis and Gordon

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We acknowledge with gratitude the financial support for the 1999 conference that has also underwritten part of the expenses of this volume: from the British Academy, the Education Renaissance Trust, the Society for Renaissance Studies; and also from Charteris plc, Farsight Management Ltd, the Van Ede Foundation and several individual donors who chose to remain anonymous; we record our warm appreciation for the generous assistance in 1999 of the National Gallery, the Accademia Italiana and the School of Economic Science, London. We also acknowledge the support of those who attended the conference and who urged us to undertake publication. Our last word of thanks is surely due to the patient forbearance and loving support throughout our labours of Elena Allen and Christopher Rees.

Finally, we would like to dedicate this *Iter Ficinianum* to the memories of Paul Oskar Kristeller and of our beloved fathers, Frederick Jack Allen and Martin Apley, who both died late in 2000 while this book was being prepared, *caelestes animi caelestis patriae cupidi*.

Michael Allen
Valery Rees

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INTRODUCTION

Michael J. B. Allen

Animarum gradus colligamus

Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), the eminent Florentine Platonist and one of the most learned and influential thinkers of his age, was ordained in 1473 and elected a canon of Florence's cathedral in 1487. Destined for a medical career by his father, a doctor in the service of the Medici, he acquired, in addition to much medical learning, a rare mastery of Plato, Aristotle and later Greek philosophy. Under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici who gave him a villa at Careggi in 1463, he set out to render all of Plato's dialogues into Latin, but interrupted this task almost immediately in order to translate the *Corpus Hermeticum* under the title of the *Pimander* which was named after the first of the fourteen treatises known to him (Tommaso Benci produced a vernacular translation of this within the year). In 1464 Ficino actually read his versions of Plato's *Parmenides* and *Philebus* to Cosimo on his deathbed. Eventually, with financing from Filippo Valori and other admirers, and having selectively consulted the renderings of some of the dialogues by such humanist predecessors as Leonardo Bruni, he published the complete Plato in 1484 (a date coinciding with a grand conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn) and dedicated it to Lorenzo de' Medici. He included prefaces (*argumenta*) for each dialogue and a long commentary on the *Symposium* that he had written by 1469 and called the *De amore* (a vernacular version of which he also prepared). This became the seminal text of Renaissance love theory. Later he composed other magisterial Plato commentaries, some complete, some not, on the *Timaeus*, *Philebus* (the subject too of a public lecture series), *Parmenides*, *Phaedrus*, *Sophist*, and on the Nuptial Number in Book VIII of the *Republic*.

While continually revising his Plato during the 1470s and publishing his *De Christiana religione* in 1476 (which was partly indebted, we now realize, to earlier anti-Jewish and anti-Moslem polemicists), he compiled his original philosophical masterpiece, an eighteen-book *summa* on metaphysics and the immortality of the soul which he did

not publish until 1482. Indebted to Augustine and Aquinas, and sustained by his own conviction that Platonism—for us Neoplatonism since he regarded Plotinus (AD 205–70) as Plato's most profound interpreter—was reconcilable with Christianity, it was called the *Theologia Platonica*. The title was borrowed from the title of Proclus's *magnum opus* to which Ficino was often, if secretly, indebted, and the subtitle, *De immortalitate animorum*, echoed the title of a treatise by Plotinus and also that of an early Platonizing treatise by Augustine. Ficino had been familiar with Plotinus since the 1460s but in the 1480s Ficino returned to the *Enneads* anew, and completed the monumental task of rendering them entire into Latin. He also wrote extensive notes and commentaries, publishing the whole in 1492 with a dedication to Lorenzo.

Meanwhile he compiled a three-book treatise, *De vita*, on prolonging health, having begun it apparently as part of his Plotinus commentary. It deals with regimen, diet, abstinence, salves, beneficent powders and sprays, aromas, psychosomatic exercises, meditation and mood-lifting techniques, as well as astrological and daemological attuning. It is replete with encyclopedic pharmacological and other learning which daringly combines philosophical, astrological, magical and psychiatric speculations. The third book in particular, entitled 'On bringing one's life into harmony with the heavens' (*De vita coelitus comparanda*), is a rich and complex exploration of scholarly melancholy, holistic medicine and psychiatry that makes continual reference to zodiacal and planetary influences, to stellar oppositions and conjunctions, to astrological election, to the theory of universal sympathies, and to synastry, the assumption that particular people born under the same planet and under the same astral configurations are therefore star twins. Additionally, following Albert the Great and Aquinas, the *De vita's* three books treat of the therapeutic powers of talismans and amulets when properly fashioned and inscribed, drawing upon scholastic notions of acquired form and the hylomorphic structuring of both corporeal and, *contra* Aquinas, of incorporeal entities. They also draw upon the Galenic and subsequently medieval notions of the vital, vegetable and animal spirits that can be refined into the pure spirit whose health is the goal of all the various interlocking therapies, since the body will be perfectly tempered if the *spiritus* is well. When the *De vita* appeared in 1489, Ficino was threatened, not unexpectedly, with a Curial investigation into its orthodoxy, but he fended it off successfully, if disingenuously, by asserting that

he was presenting ancient views rather than his own. The last few years of his life he spent publishing translations of other Neoplatonic authors, including Iamblichus, Porphyry, Proclus, Synesius and the eleventh-century Byzantine author Psellus; translating and commenting on the works of the pseudo-Areopagite, and embarking on a commentary on St Paul's epistle to the Romans. More problematically, he first supported and then vehemently attacked Savonarola.

Unlike most scholars, Ficino was able to exert a formative influence on his own and two subsequent centuries for several reasons. First, there was the intellectual appeal and novelty of his revival of Neoplatonism, which bordered on unorthodoxy or even heresy, and the unfamiliar nature of what he had to say about the complementary roles of religion and philosophy in nurturing the spiritual and noetic life. His ecumenism, his delight in the notion that worship is natural and inherently various, and his diverse interests would even today align him with the very liberal wing of Christian theologians. Second, a revered teacher of the *signori* and their sons, he cultivated and sustained a learned and pastoral correspondence with some two hundred pupils, friends, admirers, priests, patricians and patrons, many of them, including Lorenzo and sundry cardinals, in the highest offices of church and state (a circle that became known subsequently as his Platonic Academy). His twelve books of Latin letters (and there are others besides) ranging from elegant thank-you notes and witty compliments to philosophical treatises, and later rendered into Italian, are in fact an extraordinary resource for the social historian. He was also one of the first early modern intellectuals to enjoy the accelerated Europe-wide exposure made possible by the invention of the printing press, the *De amore*, the *De vita*, and the *Pimander* and Plato translations becoming bestsellers. His works are now among the most splendid and valuable incunabula.

Though he had a humanist training and freely quoted the Roman poets, and though he was a pious philosopher, scholar, apologist and priest with a missionary goal, he was nonetheless the first of the Renaissance mages dedicated to the notion of a World Spirit and a World Soul. Apart from metaphysics, ethics and psychology, his interests embraced mythology (for him poetic theology), astrology, magic, magical and figural numbers, daemonology and the occult, music (especially harmonics) and musical therapy—interests which he found in Plato and saw as authentic aspects of the Platonic tradition. His works of translation and interpretation bear witness to an enlightened

and dedicated scholarship, and the depth of his technical understanding of later Platonism has rarely been equalled. Nevertheless, it was his own original philosophical, theological and magical speculations that constituted one of the enduring monuments of Renaissance thought and were enormously and diversely influential. The first edition of his own *Opera omnia* appeared in Basel in 1561, the second, and better, edition in 1576, and the third (a reprint, strangely, of the first) in Paris in 1641. Moreover, his 1484 *Platonis Opera omnia* was reprinted several times too, as were other works or groups of works. Dubious, spurious and lost works also testify to his authority as a scholar and magus, as do many unpublished manuscripts.

*

For Ficino the path to gnosis, though perfected by Plato, had a distant origin, and he revived and refined the ancient notion of a secret, esoteric, and what Steuco would later call perennial wisdom, a *prisca theologia*, that had preceded and prepared for Christianity as the climactic Platonic revelation. As such it paralleled the Mosaic wisdom transmitted to the Hebrews by the Pentateuch, by the secrets of the Mosaic oral tradition later inscribed in the books of the Kabbalah, and by the revelations of Moses's successors, the psalmists and the prophets. For symbolic and numerological reasons he argued that Plato was the sixth in a succession of gentile sages, six being the sum of its integers and the product of its factors and thus in the arithmological tradition the perfect number. It was also the number of Jupiter, of the days of biblical creation, and, for the Neoplatonists, of the six primary ontological categories in the *Sophist* (essence, being, identity, alterity, rest and motion); and the number too of the links in the golden chain from which hangs the pendant world in Homer's famous image and which the Neoplatonists interpreted allegorically. A hexad, indeed, was such an authoritative category for charting the gentile succession of sages that Ficino had to adjust its members, since he had many more sages than slots available for them, but he eventually decided on Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras and Plato. This is remarkable on several counts: it omits such important figures as Socrates, Timaeus, Parmenides and Empedocles whose dicta Ficino often quoted as Platonic; it omits too the sibyls whose authority he accepted and in whose company he included Diotima, Socrates's teacher in the metaphysics

of love; and it insists in the Neoplatonic manner on Plato's Pythagorean wisdom, a wisdom embodied in the *aurea dicta* and *symbola* which Ficino found in Iamblichus's life of Pythagoras, translated into Latin, and published at the conclusion of his *Opera omnia*.

Ficino knew Orpheus via the many fragments quoted in Plato's works and in the works of his commentators, and via the 87 hymns we now suppose the products of later antiquity but which Ficino and his contemporaries deemed authentic. From early on when he first translated them, these *Hymns* were sacred but potentially dangerous texts. While they testified to Orpheus being the gentiles' David and his songs their psalms, and while they were cast as Platonic hymns listing the attributes of a deity in an aretology, a listing of virtues, and hiding under their polytheistic rind a monotheistic core (and critical here was the prefatory palinode, where Orpheus seems both to recant and to explain away his polytheism), they were linked nonetheless to the invocation of daemons, however positively or Platonically conceived. Warily, Ficino circulated only a few fragments in Latin to some choice friends. Orpheus himself had appeared in Plato's *Symposium* 179D as faint-hearted in his refusal to die for Eurydice (etymologized as 'breadth of judgement'), but he had been granted incantatory and mesmerizing powers that made him the paradigmatic magus bending the natural world to his will and deriving his music from the fundamental world harmonies. Ficino was flatteringly addressed by poet-friends such as Naldo Naldi as another Orpheus, and had the figure of Orpheus painted on his 'Orphic' lyre which he played in his Platonic hymn recitals, apparently to great effect since onlookers describe him as both entranced and entrancing. He seems in fact to have presided over a neo-Orphic revival at the onset of his career as a Medicean teacher and sage; and Orphic incantation became the key to his conception both of Platonic or Platonizing poetry, and of musical images and models, as the affective bearer, the perfect medium, of philosophy.

Yet Orpheus was subordinate to the two most ancient of the sages: to Hermes Trismegistus whose *Pimander* he continually cited, and whose *Asclepius* he knew from the Latin translation attributed to Apuleius, from hostile notices in Augustine and from more sympathetic ones in Lactantius. The two commentaries on these works, incidentally, which were eventually printed in Ficino's *Opera* interleaved with his own translation of the one and Apuleius's translation of the other, though long attributed to him, were actually by

his French disciple Lefèvre d'Étaples (Faber Stapulensis). However, while acknowledging Hermes's authority and the fact that Plato was reputed to have visited its temples, Ficino retained a guarded approach to Egypt's religious tradition. This was perhaps partly because Egypt appears in the Bible as the land of exile even though Moses may have taught or been taught by the Egyptian priests (and whether Hermes lived about the time of or just after Moses was determinative, though Ficino never entertained a later view that Hermes preceded Moses). Furthermore, Egypt had zoomorphic deities and inferior rites and Hermes had devised a non star-based alphabet utilizing animals, birds, and plants to convey his wisdom. Here the strange little myth of Theuth and Ammon in Plato's *Phaedrus* 274B ff. may have played a decisive role. For it portrays Ammon (Jupiter) rebuking Theuth (identified with Hermes) for inventing writing, thereby opening up the possibility of debasing or profaning teachings that should only be transmitted orally in the fullness of time by a master who has properly prepared his disciples for their reception and comprehension. An apotropaic story also attributed to Pythagoras, it creates a dilemma for a committed interpreter such as Ficino who was faced with voluminous texts of, and commentaries on, a wisdom that from the onset he felt impelled to explore and to explain, and yet held sacred and therefore to be protected from the vulgar gaze. It sets private, esoteric teaching steadfastly against public exposition, and strikes therefore at the very heart of his commitment to educating the elite of Florence.

The first sage, however, was Zoroaster. Ficino must have derived this notion in part from the controversial Byzantine Pletho, a Proclan revivalist in the train of the Emperor, who made such an impact on the Florentines during the ecumenical Council of Ferrara/Florence (1438–45), the abortive attempt to reconcile the Roman and Greek churches. But in part Ficino was following the odd sympathetic notices on Zoroaster in Plato's works, notably the *I Alcibiades* 121E ff., and in the works of such Platonizing thinkers as Plutarch of Chaeronea (fl. c. AD 100). In part too he was responding to the authority of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, a late antique compilation which he and others believed authentic, and whose Platonism therefore became for them the originary Platonism, not the derivative and eclectic Middle Platonism of its actual authors. For Ficino, however, Zoroaster's priority and therefore primacy was pre-eminently something that high-

lighted the significance of the Epiphany and the Magi. The three wise Chaldaeans who came from the East led by a star were the followers of Zoroaster (whose very name in Greek has 'star' in it and who was the putative founder both of astronomy-astrology and of the magic associated with it). Thus they symbolized the coming of the ancient wisdom to the cradle of a new philosopher-king-magus, the new Zoroaster. Having set out, moreover, from the very land whence Abram had departed, they symbolized the reunion of the two ancient branches of wisdom, the Hebrew and the Zoroastrian, that stemmed from Noah's sons (since the Ark had come to rest allegedly in a province of Persia—and Persia, Chaldea and Babylon were often confused). Insofar as Zoroaster was also, in Ficino's view, the discoverer of writing, since he used the stars and constellations as the 'letters' of his alphabet, he was in a way the sage who had transcribed the wisdom of the stars, brought the stars into men's language and made men into the writers of the stars' language. Hence the Magi were primarily astronomers and the practitioners of a stellar magic, whose knowledge had enabled them to find the Christ child and to worship him as the Zoroastrian, the supreme Platonic guardian in Bethlehem. Thus to Plato's Pythagorean, Orphic and Hermetic predecessors, we should add Zoroaster as the original *priscus theologus*, the founder of the ancient gentile wisdom that Ficino himself was dedicated to reconciling with the theology of Abraham as perfected in Christ.

The history of this wisdom after Plato was also subject to Ficino's revision since he believed that the Proclus-inspired writings we now attribute to the Pseudo-Dionysius of the late fifth century were composed by the Dionysius mentioned in Acts 17:34 as an Athenian convert of St Paul's preaching on the Areopagus, and thus by a thinker of the first century. Since one of the Dionysian treatises is a masterpiece of a negative theology inspired by the second part of Plato's *Parmenides* as interpreted by Plutarch of Athens, the teacher of Proclus (AD 410–85), this had the effect of transferring the fully fledged late Neoplatonism of Proclus back to the time immediately following the Ascension. Suddenly the opening of St John's Gospel, St Paul's epistles and the Pseudo-Areopagitean treatises coalesced to form an impressive body of Christian-Platonic writing, a body indeed that signified the perfection of the Platonic wisdom in the Christian revelation. Given the centrality in it of the way of negation, moreover,

it also had the effect of foregrounding Platonic dialectic as a mystical rather than a logical instrument, and thus of transforming the old Socratic scepticism or agnosticism into a supra-agnosticism.

This pivotal misdating in turn had an impact on Ficino's vision of the centuries we would now cede to the Middle Platonists and early Neoplatonists, and made him embrace the notion that the Ammonius Saccas who was Plotinus's teacher had been a Christian Platonist, and that the third-century Origen whom Porphyry mentions as Plotinus's fellow disciple was the Christian heresiarch, the author of the *De principiis* and *Contra Celsum*. Consequently, Plotinus emerges as a Christianized Platonist if not as a Christian. This was all-defining, given the centrality of the *Enneads* in Ficino's own understanding of Plato, and his belief that Plotinus was Plato's beloved intellectual son 'in whom', he imagines Plato saying in the words of God Himself in the Gospels, 'I am well pleased'. After all, his supreme scholarly achievement was to render the fifty-four Plotinian treatises into Latin, and to devote his interpretational life to arguing that Plotinian and Christian metaphysics were almost one and the same, that Plotinus had written a *summa Platonica* as Aquinas later a *summa theologica*. Moreover, succumbing to a familiar temptation, Ficino read most of Proclus's scholastic distinctions back into Plotinus, and thence back into Plato, into the *Orphic Hymns*, into the *Hermetica*, into the *Oracula Chaldaica*, to create an ancient Proclan theology that had begun with Zoroaster but had been perfected in the works of Plato, of Dionysius and Plotinus. Finally, since so much of Proclus had become incorporated into medieval theology by way of the Pseudo-Areopagitean writings—had indeed become embedded in the Augustinian mystical traditions of the Middle Ages—Ficino was able to argue with conviction that the time was ripe for a Platonic revival that would unite wisdom and faith, philosophy and revelation, as they had first been united in the golden age, in the pre-Noachian time of Enoch himself who had walked with God. Interestingly, this whole fabric is built on some basic mistakes in attribution and dating, but mistakes that the vast majority of Ficino's learned contemporaries shared. Thus Ficino was able to present a Neoplatonic view of the history of philosophy, and to propel that history back into the remotest past.

Indeed, his audacious attempt to reconcile Platonism with Christianity eventually transcended Platonism itself: it became a life-long ecumenical quest to introduce into orthodoxy a cento of unorthodox,

sometimes pagan, spiritual, magical and occult beliefs keyed to the theme of the soul's ascent from illusion's cave. That he had a profound posthumous impact upon the thought and culture of two centuries assuredly bespeaks the European elite's abiding, if clandestine, interest in entertaining many ideas that Plato himself would not have recognized and that had been continually censured and even persecuted by the Church. Ficino fervently believed, however, in the importance of accommodation and synthesis: *a bono in bonum omnia diriguntur*. It is this credo, inscribed on the walls of his own study, which speaks to the unified vision of goodness as well as to the abundance of argument and analysis marshalled in its quest that suffuses his many pages.

The papers in this collection testify to this manifold unity, and to the range and continuing fascination of many of Ficino's themes, theologically, philosophically and medically conceived but animated by a complex, rich and varied life that carries them beyond the traditional boundaries of the three great disciplines in which he was nurtured. The papers too, though they fall naturally into three groups, transcend their boundaries and many overlaps emerge, predictably so given the copiousness of Ficino's thought and its constant re-articulation. The prominence of Christian belief, of theology, and of a preoccupation with the soul one might well anticipate in the career of someone who was both priest and canon and one of the most influential thinkers and guides to the spiritual life of his age, but the first group of studies—on Ficino's links with the Camaldolese brothers, his positions on a number of pivotal theological issues, his debts to the Iamblichan theurgic tradition, his relationship to the medieval Jewish and cabbalistic background, his Hermeticism, his views on the *prisca theologia* and on cyclical time and reincarnation—explore alignments and juxtapositions, some of which scholarship has already in part engaged, but others of which are startlingly new or adduce new evidence. Similarly, the papers in the second group which focuses on an array of philosophical and magical issues central to Ficino's thought—his position in the Plato-Aristotle controversy, his notions of the intellect and the will, his musical magic and his conceptions of Nature and its vital seeds, his engagement with mirrors and their reflections, and with astrological clocks—offer us many insights and open up avenues for future research. The third group which deals with Ficino's context and legacy—his impact on the visual arts in the time of Cosimo, his relationship to princes, the nature of his

'Platonic Academy', his carping critics, his influence on Copernicus and, equally elusively, on the poetry of England's Chapman—could have itself easily been tripled in the light of Ficino's historical importance in a variety of contexts. Even so, many arresting issues are addressed along with intriguing questions both about the notion of influence, and how to determine it, and about the problems of delineating the relationship of abstract philosophy and theology to the arts, to science, to politics, to those in ecclesiastical and secular power.

The work of this eclectic, intricate, learned and fascinating thinker, priest and magus, Plotinian in inspiration, scholastic in form, creating its own contemplative world, its own inner spaces and luminous constellations, is obviously even now only partially understood. Equally obviously it continues to inspire, perhaps more than ever, imaginative scholarship and subtle interpretation. That the majority of the scholars represented here are under fifty and some near the beginning of their careers at the beginning of this twenty-first century is eloquent testimony both to the breadth, complexity and significance of Ficino's thought and to its allure, its *interminata potestas*.

18 May 2001

FIGINO THE PRIEST

Peter Serracino-Inglott

The provision of medical care was an integral part of the ministry to be supplied by a Christian priest. That, I think, is the most challenging thesis formulated by Ficino in the several passages of his works in which he expounds his understanding of the meaning of the priesthood. These passages occur in three different kinds of context. The first are *apologiae pro vita sua*, in particular, for his continuing to exercise the medical profession—usually gratuitously, but occasionally for payment—even after his priestly ordination. The second are appeals to popes, bishops and other ecclesiastical dignitaries in which their priestly duties are recalled in more or less generic language, but usually referring to ‘healing’, not always in a purely metaphorical sense. Finally, there are letters mainly concerned with the selection criteria to be applied in the case of candidates for the priesthood, assumed to include therapeutic aptitudes.

It is in the first kind of context that the passages of greatest pertinence to the topic of the priest-doctor occur. For instance, in the letter of self-defence (*Apologia*) addressed to the three Peters, Piero del Nero, Piero Guicciardini and Piero Soderini, on 15 September 1489, two years after his installation as canon of the cathedral chapter of Florence, Ficino roundly asserts that:

Christ himself, the giver of life, who commanded his disciples to ‘cure the sick’ in the whole world, will also enjoin priests to heal at least with herbs and stones, if they are unable to cure with words as those men did before.¹

Ficino has compressed three striking opinions in this one sentence. In the first place, he is not just talking about what Christ told his disciples to do during his historical life in Palestine fifteen hundred years before. He is asserting—in as prophetic a tone as he ever reached—that Christ is enjoining his priests to attend to the sick in

¹ Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed. and tr. by C. V. Kaske and J. R. Clark, Binghamton, NY, 1989, pp. 394–401, at pp. 396–97.

the here-and-now. Secondly, Ficino assumes that the normal way in which the cure was to be effected was by word of mouth. Priests are expected to heal the sick miraculously, presumably in the manner of the Apostles in the Book of Acts as well as of later thaumaturgists, such as Sts Cosmas and Damian and other holy healers. Thirdly, if priests, like the times, are somewhat deficient in the faith needed to produce miraculous cures, then it behoves them to resort to such means as herbs and stones. Perhaps the most interesting point here is that while Ficino appears to be, rather unusually for that time, distinguishing between what one might call 'logotherapy', curing through language or the Word, and 'object-therapy' as respectively the more properly sacerdotal and the less properly sacerdotal methods of curing, he does not distinguish within the less sacerdotal procedures between what we might call scientific or natural methods on the one hand, and superstitious or intuitive methods on the other.

In the passage just quoted and in other parallel contexts, Ficino proceeds to give three lines of argument in support of his general thesis that the priesthood and medical practice were intimately connected. The first line of argument is that, although a certain division of labour had come about between priest and doctor as a matter of historical cultural practice, yet, in origin and essence, there was an *identity* of function. Thus, in the *Oratio de laudibus medicinae*, Ficino says:

Among the Egyptians and the Persians, the same men were both priests and doctors. . . . The priests of the Egyptians, most ancient of races, were without exception outstanding physicians . . . The Persian magi or priests . . . [wrote] countless books to safeguard our health.²

Ficino quotes Egyptians and Persians because he believed they were the recipients of a primitive revelation from God, which was presumably the foundation of what their priest-doctors did, as well as said. But this belief is not absolutely necessary to the point he is making. An anthropologist today might want to give illustrations of a more abundant and different nature, but I doubt if anyone would want to quarrel with Ficino's genealogical point. The association of disease with death as punishment for some primordial crime, or for some other sinful happening, is too widespread not to have given rise, as far back as the human power of tracing goes, to the coupling

² *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, 6 vols to date, London, 1975-, III, p. 24.

of healing endeavours with supernatural invocation; and, hence, of the medical with the sacerdotal functions, inasmuch as (with hindsight or in terms of some primitive differentiation between matter and spirit) the two functions can be distinguished at all in the cultural context of the dawn of humanity.

In Ficino's own day, the law still required medical doctors to ensure that prayers were said and that recourse was had to the sacrament of confession, in cases of danger of death, before the doctors proceeded with their own therapy. It was the priests who had earlier yielded to others—the doctors—the non-verbal and non-sacramental kinds of counteraction against disease. These material counteractions were admittedly quite generally recognized not to have been very effective anyway; nevertheless, devout Christians were taught that they were duty-bound to take all available licit means to recover bodily health. The desacralization of disease was not to take place in Western culture before the complex process which Michel Foucault has called 'la naissance de la clinique' was completed between 1780 and 1820. This process took place, of course, against the backdrop of the by then dominant Cartesian concept of the body as machine, a concept which, in spite of his Platonic dualism, Ficino would not have been inclined to accept.

On the contrary, what is most striking in Ficino's references to the primordial conjunction of priesthood and health care is that he hardly ever, if at all, formulates it in terms of a link between sin and sickness, but rather in terms of a positive link between health of body and health of soul. Both kinds of health were understood to be of divine origin and to have been originally intended by God to be safeguarded by his priests, even if a later process of correlated specialization had occurred, for reasons which are not difficult to guess.

In the second place, Ficino points to the practice of Christ himself and to his mandate to the Apostles. Indeed, all the statements whereby Christ has been deemed by the Church to have ordained his first priests have just two essential messages: to preach the good news of salvation and to cure, without distinguishing between the physical and the spiritual. In this regard, a contemporary exegete of the Bible would hardly want to question the essential accuracy of Ficino's assertion, any more than an anthropologist would want to question his ethnographic thesis.

Typically, however, it is a third reason which Ficino regards as

the most fundamental ground for holding that the priest should also be a doctor, namely, the psycho-physically interactive constitution of man himself. Ficino argues that the functions of priest and doctor cannot be separated, but not because body and soul constitute one substance or one person, as a Thomist philosopher might have said. As a Platonic-dualist, Ficino grounds his position on the interactivity between the body and the soul.

When Ficino is being more formal, he puts forward, as is well-known, a tripartition of man into body, soul and spirit, with 'spirit' as the medium of communication between body and soul. There is no need to enter here into the question whether the spirit is itself also the 'world-soul'. In a letter to Francesco Musano of Iesi,³ Ficino relates the tripartite division body-spirit-soul to his own personal triple practice of medicine, music and theology, arguing that just as the body is healed by medicine and the soul is purified by the divine mysteries of theology, so the spirit is tempered by aromas, sound and song.⁴ Had Ficino ever set out his theology of the priesthood systematically, he might have included musicianship as well as medicine among the qualities most desirable in a candidate for the priesthood. It would not have worried him that musicality is a natural gift, the presence of which does not depend much on the goodwill of a person. Ficino's concept of the priesthood was undoubtedly charismatic;⁵ and he will have seen vocation to it as part of a providential plan or design. For instance, in a letter to Cardinal Riario, Ficino wrote: 'Holy Orders do not arise out of the caprice of fortune, but from the eternal wisdom of God.'⁶ However, Ficino does not usually bring in his theory of *spiritus*—of the world-soul or of music—when focusing on the interweaving of priesthood and medicine. He insists rather on the intensity of psychosomatic interactions, basing himself as usual mainly on *auctoritates* both pagan and biblical.

His fundamental reference is to Hippocrates and his saying that

³ *Letters*, I, p. 39.

⁴ Cf. D. P. Walker, 'Ficino's *spiritus* and Music', in *Annales musicologiques*, I (1953), pp. 131–50, repr. in Walker's *Music, Spirit and Language in the Renaissance*, ed. by P. Gouk, London, 1985, art. VIII.

⁵ The notion of 'charisma' derives mainly from St Paul, Rom. 12:4–8, I Cor. 12:4–27 and Eph. 4:7–16. It refers primarily to special gifts bestowed on individual believers, among them that of healing, as distinct from the grace conferred upon all those who are saved. Cf. J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Edinburgh, 1998.

⁶ *Letters*, IV, p. 38.

the care of the soul and the care of the body are one. The two kinds of health have a reciprocal influence on each other. Primary emphasis is laid on the dependence of the health of the body on that of the soul, a statement bolstered by reference to Plato's attribution of this belief to the Persians. But the influence of the body upon the soul, for good or ill, is also secondarily recognized by way of reference to Avicenna. This two-way traffic is consecrated, as it were, by reference to the biblical story of Adam. In that story it is claimed that man's sin had an effect on the condition of the entire material universe, which turned from garden into jungle. This deterioration of man's environment shows that there is a nexus between the spiritual condition of man's soul and the material context of man's life. Perhaps the trickiest part in Ficino's argument is his attributing to Socrates, in the proof of the soul's power over the body in the *Charmides*, the claim that Thracian doctors cured illnesses by means of magical invocations. Despite Ficino's distancing himself, in this context, several removes from the claim, the suspicion can easily arise that he is identifying priest and doctor rather too easily by reducing both to a third kind of agent, that of magician. But, in fact, Ficino's case does not depend at all on his failing to make a sharper distinction between the supernatural and the magical or on his apparent shifts of position on their relationship. The ground of Ficino's argument in support of the thesis that a psychosomatic approach is always required in the care of the health of human beings and hence that there is a necessary affinity between the sacerdotal and medical vocations, is simply that an element of logotherapy—of curing through language—is always involved in any kind of healing.

Thus, the real affinity between the function of priest and that of doctor turns out in the end to be that both are essentially counselors. Both priest and doctor are guides to a better and higher life. The resources they need for their work have to consist mainly of items of knowledge received from predecessors in a longstanding tradition amounting to a legacy of acquired wisdom, on the one hand, and a greater or lesser degree of personal inspiration, in the sense of an individual capacity for extraordinary empathy with other human beings, on the other. It is the combination of inherited knowledge and instinctive understanding that makes some persons able to provide the logotherapy required of a priest-doctor.

The second type of context in which Ficino discusses the priesthood

seems to confirm the impression that he considered the therapeutic dimension of the priesthood as preferably a divinely given charisma, a special gift of God, gratuitously given to those chosen by Him, an aspect of the supernatural sanctity to be petitioned of God by the priest, rather than a set of skills that was to be acquired by theoretical and practical training. This belief probably explains why, in his many letters to popes and bishops, where he emphasizes their pastoral duties as shepherds of their flocks, he rarely seems to mention any of what one might call specifically priestly duties, such as the administration of the sacraments or care of the sick. He does refer to their function as 'healers' very often, but generally in a metaphorical sense: the wounds they have to heal are rarely physical. It is the basic Christian virtues that are to be practised by all people that Ficino urges the 'high' priests to practise, supposing that the specifically priestly powers, such as that of healing, would emerge on their own, if plain sanctity were cultivated.

As an example of this approach, let us take one short letter addressed to a priest by the name of Pace, a Professor of Canon Law, that is entirely centred on the theme of the 'dignity of the priest'.⁷ The letter pivots on the analogy between priest and angel as both messengers of God. First the point is made that *corruptio optimi pessima*—when the best men go to the bad, it is the worst sort of corruption—but then that the priest is not just the mediator or go-between between God and humankind, as he is most often taken to be, but rather a deputy of, a stand-in, a representative of God. Ficino goes on to say that a priest actually *is* God for a time. 'A priest is a kind of temporal God'.⁸ God himself is a priest—that is, a miraculous healer—for ever, eternally. This implies that Ficino understands priesthood to be not a mediatorship or brokerage between God and mankind, but the possession in a limited way of supernatural powers such as God has in a limitless way. While Ficino does not explicitly specify here what these supernatural powers are, the context is that of making the broken whole, of salvation, *salus* being a notion etymologically linked to wholeness and health. It is because of thaumaturgical capability, the ability to perform miracles, that Ficino sees the priesthood first as angelic and then as provisionally divine.

⁷ *Letters*, I, p. 121.

⁸ *Letters*, I, p. 122.

The third type of context in which Ficino discusses the priesthood is on the several occasions when he wrote to bishops in connection with ordinations. His starting point is always the need for selectivity. In one case, that of the candidacy for the priesthood of his nephew Sebastiano Salvini, about whom Ficino wrote to the Bishop of Cortona,⁹ he encapsulates in a brief formula the three qualities which he deems necessary for ordination: that the candidate should be 'learned, dutiful to God and just towards men'. It is typical of Ficino that he puts learning before what are essentially the two parts of the one Judaeo-Christian commandment: love God and your fellow men. The order both foreshadows St Teresa of Avila saying that learning was a requirement in a confessor prior even to sanctity, and reflects the formula of the established curriculum of university studies which laid down philosophy as the basic course to be taken before proceeding to theology or medicine, the twin routes which Ficino would have liked to see integrated in the priest's formation, as they had been in his own personal experience.

Ficino suggests three methods of investigation which the Bishop could use in order to determine the suitability of a candidate for the priesthood. The first is to ask him to speak out for himself.¹⁰ Ficino here refers to the Socratic comparison of a vessel and its sound to a human being and his speech, with a stress on the identity of soul and self. Secondly, Ficino puts forward a suggestion which he then cautiously withdraws. 'If you were learned in the art of Zopyros,¹¹ I would perhaps add that you should take into consideration his (the candidate's) natural characteristics.' On other occasions,¹² Ficino suggests that both physiognomy and astrology are relevant to determining if there is a priestly vocation or not, as they are to the choice of any profession; here he seems to deny it: 'The Master of Life forbids us to judge a man by his appearance'. But Ficino has a way out for the physiognomist, when he chooses to take it; he can judge not *by* appearances, but *through* them; his insight can penetrate through the outer looks to the essence. In the letter to the Bishop of Cortona, Ficino does not even allude to the stars, to which at times he attached

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. and n. 3 on p. 214: Zopyrus was a celebrated physiognomist, contemporary with Socrates; see Cicero, *De Fato*, 10, *Tusculan Disputations*, IV.80.

¹² For example, in *De vita*, III.23.

much greater importance than to physiognomy. In the range of Ficino's accounts of the priesthood, this is probably the most extreme of his oscillations towards the pole of pure spirituality as man's essence and away from the pole of insistence on psychosomatic interactivity. The third line of investigation which Ficino encourages the bishop to conduct is the juridical, namely to ask for guarantors of or witnesses to the suitability of the candidate. In this case, he offers himself and the Bishop of Volterra.¹³ In these letters of recommendation, Ficino for obvious reasons somewhat blurs the singularity of his own concepts, without however denying any important point of his personal convictions.

If Ficino stressed the importance of vetting candidates for the priesthood in the case of others, he is unlikely to have made an exception of himself. Yet biographers of Ficino do not seem in general to have attached any very great significance to his ordination to the priesthood at the unusual age of 40. They dutifully register that he was ordained deacon on 18 September 1473 in the chapel of St Vincent in the archbishop's palace in Florence by Mgr Giuliano di Antonio on behalf of Cardinal Pietro Riario, and then priest three months later in the same place by the same bishop. But it does not seem to have occurred to any biographer that the reason for the ordination may be logically connected to his idea of the priest-doctor. There is indeed a suggestion in Corsi that Ficino's decision to seek ordination to the priesthood was related to emergence from a depression such as his allegedly Saturnine temperament made him prone to.¹⁴ This hypothesis has indeed been discussed by some of the most authoritative of Ficino's biographers and commentators on his life, such as Raymond Marcel and Paul Oskar Kristeller; but no one has supposed that there was not only a chronological but also a causal sequence between the supposed depression and the subsequent ordination. That would be to attribute to Ficino a pattern of behaviour analogous to that of contemporary people with psychological problems who become psychologists in the hope of curing themselves.

¹³ *Letters*, I, pp. 122–23.

¹⁴ The background of the idea of a relationship between psychological depression and spiritual hearkening to a call is given in R. Klibansky, E. Panofsky and F. Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, London, 1964, and André Chastel, *Marsile Ficin et l'art*, Geneva and Lille, 1954; repr. Geneva, 1996, pp. 177–85.

In the *De Christiana religione* Ficino himself promoted the idea that he had undergone some crisis of conscience—a moral rather than a psychological crisis, similar to that undergone by St Jerome when he felt himself accused in a vision of having been more a Ciceronian than a Christian. However, it is unlikely that Ficino would ever have felt that there had been any tug-of-war between Platonism and Christianity. Although it is true that at the time of his ordination, he concentrated on writing *De Christiana religione* (which, uniquely in his oeuvre, has a rather unecumenical tone) for publication the next year, there was certainly no dramatic, road-to-Damascus type of conversion. He did not turn from Platonic paganism to orthodox Christianity when he became a priest. It seems rather to have been that Ficino considered ordination to the priesthood as the divine bringing together and joint fulfilment of the two vocations to which he felt called: medicine and philosophy. Let us briefly survey what Ficino did as a priest.

When he became a cleric, Ficino seems to have taken all the duties attendant on his new status with due diligence. The benefices of which he was given charge, that of the Church of Santa Maria a Monte Vargi, in 1470, three years before his ordination to the priesthood, presumably in connection with his taking minor orders; and those of San Bartolomeo a Pomino in the year of his ordination and of San Cristoforo a Novoli a year later, cannot have entailed any heavy obligations.

But there is clear proof of the importance he attached to his election as canon of the cathedral in 1487. This emerges in the letter of thanks sent to Lorenzo and Giovanni de' Medici on 19 March of that year;¹⁵ incidentally, it was because Giovanni had declined the canonry that it had been assigned to Ficino. Ficino's gratification was also expressed in the oration that he delivered on his installation on 22 March.¹⁶ He appears in fact to have been regularly engaged in preaching at the cathedral, at least from 1487, the year

¹⁵ P. Viti, 'Documenti ignoti per la biografia di Ficino', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Studi e documenti*, ed. by G. C. Garfagnini, 2 vols, Florence, 1986, I, pp. 251–83, at p. 275. The text of this letter is given in P. O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2 vols, Florence, 1937, p. 57, and will be translated in the forthcoming volume VII of the *Letters*. See also a later letter to Giovanni de' Medici in Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basel, 1576; repr. Turin, 1959 etc., p. 930.

¹⁶ Viti, 'Documenti ignoti', p. 275, and Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, p. 58.

of his installation. The commentary on the letters of St Paul, which Ficino worked on for publication in the year before his death, seems to have been an offshoot of his preaching. If this is the case Ficino's style of preaching differs very conspicuously from that of his contemporary, Savonarola.

That there are several documents granting Ficino dispensations from various offices, such as choir attendance when he was about a year from his death,¹⁷ is clear proof that he did not take his duties as a canon lightly. There even exist documents which show that he carried out purely administrative tasks, which can only have been chores performed in a spirit of pure service.¹⁸ There is also a letter dated 6 October 1487 in which Lorenzo de' Medici urged that Ficino should be made Bishop of Cortona in the event of a vacancy.¹⁹ Clearly, Ficino did not become a priest just nominally. He committed himself to engaging in quite significant pastoral and specifically clerical activity. However it is not at all surprising that little attention has been given to these facets of his daily life; they have nothing extraordinary about them. What is extraordinary is that they were carried out by Ficino. It is clear, moreover, that Ficino carried on doing the two kinds of counselling activity, on health of body and health of soul, that he had been doing previously. It was the convergence of these two kinds of counselling which, he had come to the conclusion, constituted the essence of the priesthood. Ordination to it had chiefly the effect of making this point manifest: it was just its epiphany.

Ficino had always taken Plato's various comparisons of philosophical inquiry with the mystery religions very seriously. Indeed he clearly regarded both Socrates and Plato as some sort of unordained high-priests.²⁰ He conjured up, in preference to—though not in substitution of—Plato's philosopher-king, the figure of the philosopher-priest. This was essentially someone ordained to heal disease of all kinds through inspirational counselling. The priestly task of kingship was not that attributed to Louis X at Sainte Chapelle, to bear the sins of the world, but essentially to act as spiritual guide.

¹⁷ Viti, 'Documenti ignoti', p. 280.

¹⁸ Ibid., passim.

¹⁹ P. O. Kristeller, 'Marsilio Ficino and his Work after Five Hundred Years', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, pp. 15–196, at p. 48.

²⁰ See Michael J. B. Allen on Socrates in *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Florence, 1998, ch. 4.

The first disease to be treated by the priest was, of course, unbelief. Ficino claimed that priests would find in the Platonic Academy (whatever that means) some of the tools they needed in order to bring those who were unbelievers on philosophical grounds back to the faith. Several of Ficino's pupils actually became priests. Other priests who were his friends—though they were a very mixed lot, ranging from writers of erotic verse to ardent Savonarolans—he attempted in various ways and in different degrees to imbue with Platonic learning. At least one, Befani, became famous as an astrologer, but none of them seems to have been, or to have become, like Ficino himself, a doctor of medicine as well as a practitioner of philosophy.

If Ficino was right about the priesthood, and if his main point was to bring out into the open the fact that philosophy and medicine were not two sharply distinct things, but that the priesthood consisted in the dialectic of their interplay, then the question naturally arose: why was the figure of the priest-doctor, in practice, such a rarity in comparison, say, with that of the philosopher-doctor? There were abundant examples of the latter, the most notable perhaps being Avicenna and the closest to us, centuries after Ficino, being perhaps John Locke (unless we also include missionaries like Schweitzer, who have certainly a claim to being considered philosophical theologians, even if they do not get noticed in current standard histories of philosophy). Perhaps it was because of this difficulty that Ficino's strategy was to affirm first that a priest had to be a philosopher. Then he argued that a philosopher should be expert in all things human and hence justified the conclusion that a priest should be, if not a thaumaturgist, at least a doctor.

Ficino himself described several instances when his own medical practice appears indissociable from an overtly priestly role. Take his treatment of his own tailor Francesco, or of a Jewish family, where he makes a point of noting that he used prayer as part of the therapy he applied.²¹ Of course, this was the practice of almost all doctors,²² but Ficino considered it an expression of their implicit priesthood, that is, of the fact that curing the sick was in itself an intrinsically sacerdotal task.

²¹ *Opera omnia*, pp. 1469–70.

²² *Opera omnia*, pp. 644–45; *Letters*, I, pp. 126–29. See also François Lebrun, *Se soigner autrefois: médecins, saints et sorciers aux 17^e et 18^e siècles*, Paris, 1983, ch. 1.

But it is in the role of psychological counsellor, even more than as a prayer-leader, that Ficino appears to have discerned a more manifestly sacerdotal dimension to the physician's work. When Ficino was ill, the physician called to his bedside, Antonio di Paolo Benivieni, happened also to be an astrologer, but his contemporaries thought him to be the author of quasi-miraculous cures because, as he himself explained in his casebooks, he had successfully diagnosed the psychological sources of apparently physical ailments.²³ Ficino undoubtedly considered him to have been an unordained priest; being unordained affected only the visibility, not the reality of the priesthood. In terms of Thomistic theology, Benivieni had the *res* (the substance and specific grace) of priesthood, even if not the *signum* (the sacramental ordination and outward markings, such as distinctive ceremonial clothing).

I will conclude with a few brief remarks on the sustainability of Ficino's concept of the priesthood within the Catholic conceptual framework that he professed to be his own. Ficino's argument that the priest should also be a doctor is somewhat muddled by the dubiously 'magical' powers which he seems to allow for in his picture of both, and in virtue of which they become reducible to one. But it is not difficult (and not disloyal to Ficino's basic way of thinking) to treat the magical dimension as a dispensable adjunct.

The essential elements of Ficino's argument are the following: human ailments, whether of body or soul, are sometimes curable by the words of what can be called 'philosophic' wisdom; from the Gospels it is indisputably clear that Christ ordained his 'priests' by investing them with a twofold mission, namely, proclaiming the good news and restoring to health. The essential element of Christian priesthood is consequently the capacity to speak to one's fellow human beings in such a way as to enable them to attain both intellectual enlightenment *and* physical wholeness.

Given this perspective, the administration of the sacraments—the eucharist and penance in particular, since they are regarded as the ones most typically requiring a priestly minister—are speech-actions which are just visible instances of attempted logotherapy. The distinctive mark of the priest, in Ficino's view, was his power as a

²³ *Opera omnia*, p. 829; *Letters*, V, p. 55. See also Antonio Benivieni, *De regimine sanitatis ad Laurentium Medicem*, ed. by Luigi Belloni, Turin, 1951.

healer. This power, in turn, is the product of his diagnostic insight into and empathy with human beings, his intuitive ability to perceive what is really wrong with them and identify the needed cure. It would not be difficult to show that a very similar concept of the priesthood seems to have been held by at least two of the spiritual geniuses of our time who, while not themselves priests, have perhaps probed most deeply into the nature of the priesthood: the young woman, St Teresa of Lisieux, and the novelist Georges Bernanos. But that is another matter.

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THE CAMALDOLESE ACADEMY: AMBROGIO
TRAVERSARI, MARSILIO FICINO AND THE CHRISTIAN
PLATONIC TRADITION¹

Dennis F. Lackner

During the fifteenth century the Camaldolese order played a formative role in the Renaissance revival of the Christian Platonic tradition. This Camaldolese influence can be traced to the very origins of the Renaissance of ancient learning and persisted through the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. As early as the 1420s, when Marsilio Ficino's intellectual forbears frequented the Florentine monastery of S. Maria degli Angeli, a central current of Renaissance thought drew upon the Platonically inspired spiritual traditions and ascetic practices of the Egyptian Desert Fathers. These practices, perpetuated in the daily lives of the Camaldolese brethren, were experienced first-hand by the early Florentine humanists. This same Christian Platonic spirituality was transmitted to centres of learning throughout Europe through the numerous translations and transcriptions of ancient authors carried out by scribes and scholars living in the Camaldolese monastery.

The Angeli was home to the Camaldolese Hellenist Ambrogio Traversari, whose translations of the ancient Christian Platonists became fundamental sources for Ficino's *Theologia Platonica*. Traversari's friends and disciples, within the order and in the world, came to form the core of early Florentine Platonism. The connection between these early Platonic enthusiasts and the Camaldolese was especially strong in circles associated with the Medici family. Thus the protagonist 'Ficinus' first appeared in print in Landino's *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, expounding the contemplative ascent to Lorenzo de' Medici and other humanist friends gathered at the hermitage of Camaldoli. Ficino

¹ I would like to record my thanks to the scholars, friends and family whose works and personal encouragement inspired the research leading to this paper. They will be fully acknowledged in a book I am preparing on the Camaldolese order and the Italian Renaissance, upon which this article is based.

himself expounded the mysteries of Plato and Plotinus in the Camaldolese church of S. Maria degli Angeli. Here Ficino preached sermons, celebrated the monastic offices and developed a circle of initiates among the white-robed brethren. Ficino's disciples at the Angeli included the Camaldolese humanist Paolo Orlandini, who wrote Platonically inspired poems and dialogues which sought to demonstrate that the teachings of Plato's Academy were Christian and monastic in character. Orlandini became the spiritual father of Camaldolese humanists of the Aldine circle in Venice, who in turn maintained close ties with Ficino's successors Corsi and Diacceto. This paper seeks to trace the links between the Camaldolese order and Renaissance Platonism over four generations (from the early Quattrocento to the early Cinquecento) and to demonstrate that the Camaldolese played a central and hitherto unrecognized role in the conception, establishment, teachings and wider influence of the Platonic Academy of Florence.

What shared spiritual and intellectual traditions united the Camaldolese order so closely with Renaissance Platonism? The primary common source was the Fathers of the East. The Camaldolese eremitic tradition, established in the eleventh century by Saint Romuald of Ravenna, had close links with the ascetic tradition of the Greek Fathers.² This spirituality, manifest in the lives and writings of the Egyptian Desert Fathers,³ John Cassian, John Climacus, Dionysius

² In the early Quattrocento the Camaldolese order comprised over 200 monasteries, hermitages, hospitals and churches, concentrated in Tuscany and the Veneto and situated in both town and countryside. The order's administrative seat was at Camaldoli, located in the remote Apennine mountains between the territories of Florence and Venice. Camaldoli was made up of a fortress-like monastery called Fontebuono, built half-way up the mountain, and a hermitage, the Sacro Eremo di Camaldoli, located near the summit. The order's most famous urban houses were in Florence, S. Maria degli Angeli, and in Venice, S. Michele di Murano in the Venetian lagoon. On the administration and organization of the order in general see G. B. Mittarelli and G. D. Costadoni, *Annales Camaldulenses Ordinis Sancti Benedicti*, 9 vols, Venice, 1755–73, VI–VIII; Agostino Fortunio, *Historiarum Camaldulensium libri tres*, Florence, 1575; Traversari's *Epistolae*, Dolfin's *Epistolae*. M. E. Maghera Cataluccio and A. Ugo Fossa, *Biblioteca e cultura a Camaldoli: Dal medioevo all'umanesimo*, Rome, 1979, p. 10, emphasize three spiritual influences on Romuald's eremiticism: the *Psalter*, the *Vitae Patrum* and John Cassian. See Peter Damian's *Vita Beati Romualdi*, ed. by G. Tabacco, Rome, 1957, p. 28. On Romuald see G. Tabacco in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, XI, Rome, 1968, cols 365–75, and C. Caby, 'Du Monastère à la cité: le culte de Saint Romuald au moyen âge', *Revue Mabillon*, 67 (1995), pp. 137–58.

³ In addition to the sources listed in the preceding note, see Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of Saint Anthony: The Making of a Saint*, Minneapolis, Minn., 1995.

the Areopagite and the Cappadocian Fathers, exemplified the Christian Platonism of the early Church. A central theme in the desert spirituality which Romuald brought to the Apennines was the theology of the mystical ascent, the *scala perfectionis*. Ascending hierarchies of being, the ascetic sought a vision of cosmic harmony illumined by heavenly love. Tradition relates that a vision of a ladder ascending into heaven had inspired St Romuald's foundation of the hermitage of Camaldoli.⁴ Perpetuating traditions of the Christian East expressed in John Climacus's *Scala Paradisi*, the Camaldolese sought to ascend this ladder by transfiguring the desires of nature into the desire for God. 'Physical love can be a paradigm for the longing for God' and 'Happy the man who loves and longs for God as a smitten lover does for his beloved.'⁵ From their earliest years the Camaldolese thus conserved a kind of Christian-Platonic theology of the ladder, with roots in the Christian East, which propounded a model of man's gradual divinization through celestial love.⁶ Thus on the one hand Camaldolese hierarchs found in Florentine Platonism a kindred spirituality. On the other hand, the Renaissance Platonists saw in the Camaldolese life the embodiment of Platonic principles. From Romuald's foundation of hermitages in the eleventh century to Traversari's translations in the fifteenth, Platonic spirituality was a characteristic theme

⁴ Arriving in the environs of Arezzo, Romuald met a certain Count Maldolo, who told the saint of a dream he had of a ladder, like that of Jacob, on which a great number of white-robed persons ascended to heaven. On the site of Maldolo's dream in the Apennines, Romuald founded the Hermitage of Camaldoli. *Liber eremitice regule* of the Blessed Rudolph is edited in Mittarelli and Costadoni, *Annales Camaldulenses*, III, App., p. 542. The *Liber* is dated by G. Tabacco, 'La data di fondazione di Camaldoli', *Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia*, 16 (1962), pp. 451-55 to the year 1150 at the earliest. Caby, 'Du Monastère à la cité', pp. 139-44, discusses further examples of 'le thème de l'échelle' in Camaldolese art and spirituality.

⁵ Climacus synthesized the tradition of the Egyptian Desert Fathers (John Cassian, Anthony the Great, the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*) which became a primary source of St Romuald's spirituality. See John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, tr. by C. Luibhéid and N. Russell, New York, 1982, pp. 236 and 287. On the Christian-Platonic theme of divinizing love in Climacus and the Orthodox tradition see Kallistos Ware's introduction, pp. 1-70, esp. pp. 29-33. Traversari translated Climacus into Latin in 1419.

⁶ See Cataluccio and Fossa, *Biblioteca e cultura a Camaldoli*, p. 421, observing at Camaldoli 'l'esistenza e la conservazione di un substrato sociostorico e spirituale collegato all'eremitismo mistico di estrazione greco-orientale' closely linked to Platonism. For this mystical conception in the Renaissance, see for instance Ficino's *Phaedrus* commentary and examples listed below; Traversari's Dionysius and Climacus translations or Pico's discussion of the 'pugna spiritualis' of our 'asceso al cielo' in the *Heptaplus*, VIII.1.

of the Camaldolese. In the age of Ficino, Platonic philosophy and Camaldolese spirituality, so long associated through ascetic practice and mystical theology, again converged at S. Maria degli Angeli in Florence.

In 1433, the year of Marsilio Ficino's birth, Ficino's 'soul father' Cosimo de' Medici received the dedication of the first Latin translation of Diogenes Laertius's *Vitae philosophorum*.⁷ The *Vitae* contained the first comprehensive summary of Platonic philosophy available in the Latin West in a millennium. The *Vita Platonis* also contained accounts of the ancient Academy's founder in terms in which a Christian audience could recognize sanctity. Years later Ficino himself would draw upon Diogenes's portrayal of *divinus ille Plato*. Plato was chaste, pious and charitable towards mankind 'leaving nothing untried in his disputations in any way conducive to salvation'. Indeed Plato was a kind of monk: 'he abandoned his worldly goods, practised an ascetic way of life at his Academy',⁸ and there with his disciples sought to ascend the ladder to the divine through supernatural love. The world-denying *ascesis* of Plato's Academy could thus be seen as a prefiguration of Christian monasticism. The translator of Diogenes Laertius was in fact himself a Camaldolese monk, Ambrogio Traversari, who in the year of this dedication was elected General of the order.⁹ For over a decade Cosimo had regularly consulted with Traversari at S. Maria degli Angeli in Florence, where the Camaldolese scholar convened some of the leading humanists of the early Quattrocento.¹⁰ Cosimo had collaborated with Traversari in commissioning

⁷ See M. Gigante, 'Ambrogio Traversari interprete di Diogene Laerzio', in *Ambrogio Traversari nel VI centenario della nascita*, ed. by G. C. Garfagnini, Florence, 1988, pp. 367-459.

⁸ James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Leiden etc., 1990, pp. 324-26, summarizing Ficino's letter to Francesco Bandini in Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basel 1576; repr. Turin, 1959 etc., pp. 763-70. Ficino here follows Diogenes Laertius's story (III.1) of Plato's divine origin and virgin birth.

⁹ General studies on Traversari include C. L. Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers: Ambrogio Traversari (1386-1439) and Christian Antiquity in the Italian Renaissance*, Albany, NY, 1977; C. Somigli and G. Bargellini, *Ambrogio Traversari monaco camaldolese: la figura e la dottrina monastica*, Bologna, 1986; A. Dini-Traversari, *Ambrogio Traversari e i suoi tempi*, Florence, 1912. Early sources for Traversari's life include Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le Vite*, ed. by Aulo Greco, 2 vols, Florence, 1970, II, pp. 449-61; Fortunio, *Historiarum Camaldulensium libri*, pp. 341-400, and Mittarelli and Costadoni, *Annales Camaldulenses*, VI-VII. On early Camaldolese accounts of Traversari see Ugo Fossa, 'La storiografia camaldolese sul Traversari dal Quattrocento al Settecento', in *Ambrogio Traversari nel VI centenario*, pp. 121-46.

¹⁰ Traversari's correspondence, ed. by P. Canneti, was published as the second

a reliquary from Ghiberti for the monastery, where Traversari revived the primitive Christian tradition of celebrating martyrs' feast days with an annual meal in the monastery (a tradition which Ficino would later repeat with Plato).¹¹ Cosimo was also instrumental in funding the building of Brunelleschi's Rotunda, the first centrally planned church of the Renaissance, where decades later Marsilio Ficino was to expound Platonic theology.¹² But the year 1433, and the new availability of the *Vita Platonis*, must mark a turning point in the relationship between the Camaldolese and Platonism. Initially reluctant to translate the voluminous pagan work, Traversari was at length persuaded by Cosimo and Niccolò Niccoli.¹³ The effort, which coincided with the related but more orthodox task of translating Johannes Moschus's *Vitae patrum*, yielded unexpected results. In his preface to Cosimo, the Camaldolese translator marvelled at examples from classical antiquity of souls who seemed to approach perfection and the true life before its revelation in Christ, and who proclaimed doctrines in accordance with the true faith: 'In the writings of all the more notable philosophers, God, the heavens, the celestial bodies and nature are truly and subtly discussed, and largely in agreement with Christian truth . . . God permitting, from their

volume of *Ambrosii Traversarii Generalis Camaldulensis Vita, sive Historia litteraria florentina ab anno MCXCII usque ad annum MCCCCXL*, ed. by Laurentius Mehus, Florence, 1759; repr. Bologna, 1968, and Munich, 1968, henceforth referred to as Traversari, *Epp.* In the Munich edition Eckhard Kessler provides a valuable summary and chronological bibliography. F. P. Luiso, *Riordinamento dell'epistolario di A. Traversari con lettere inedite e note storico-cronologiche*, 3 parts, Florence, 1898-1903, provides dates, hereafter attached in parentheses after Traversari's letters.

¹¹ Traversari, *Epp.*, VIII.32 (1424) to Lorenzo and Cosimo de' Medici; Richard Krautheimer, *Lorenzo Ghiberti*, Princeton, 1956, pp. 138-39, 147, 287.

¹² C. Stinger, 'Ambrogio Traversari and the "Tempio degli Scolari" at S. Maria degli Angeli in Florence', in *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore*, ed. by S. Bertelli and G. Ramakus, 2 vols, Florence, 1978, I, pp. 271-86. See also Patricia Waddy, 'Brunelleschi's Design for S. Maria degli Angeli in Florence', *Marsyas*, 15 (1972), pp. 36-46.

¹³ See Traversari, *Epp.*, VI.5, 12, 14, 16, 17, 23 (27 May 1425), 25 (8 July 1425), 27 (5 August 1425); VII.2; VIII.1, 6, 8, 9, 10, 17 (1426?), 26 (1425-26); XXIV.38 (10-20 September 1428), 43 (2 May 1433), 47 (20 June 1433). Cf. George Holmes, *The Florentine Enlightenment, 1400-1450*, London, 1969, p. 96. See also Gigante's discussion of Traversari's correspondence relating to the Diogenes Laertius translation, 'Ambrogio Traversari interprete di Diogene Laerzio', pp. 377-400, and Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers*, pp. 72-74, p. 252, n. 168. A. Sottili, 'Autografi e traduzioni di Ambrogio Traversari', *Rinascimento*, 2a ser., 16 (1976), pp. 3-15, at p. 11, identified the presentation copy as Florence, MS Laur. LXV.21, dated 8 February 1433.

testimony also the true faith might receive support and strength'.¹⁴

Traversari's humanist inkling that the 'more notable philosophers' of Greece were largely in harmony with Gospel truth was far from empty rhetoric, but a belief in complete accord with the Greek Fathers whom Traversari dedicated his life to translating into Latin. St Basil, whom Traversari studied, translated and revered, wrote a letter to the young, *On the Value of Greek Literature*, which affirmed the 'great value' of imitating actions of pagan philosophers that correspond to Christian ideals, like Socrates's patient endurance of ill-treatment. Origen, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Dionysius the Areopagite (all of whom Traversari studied and translated) held similar views on the lives and doctrines of the pre-eminent Greek philosophers, though like Traversari, they upheld the primacy of true Christian virtue over the 'shadowy image of virtue' in the pagan philosophers. Among these 'more notable philosophers' Plato represented, for Diogenes as well as for his Camaldolese translator, the greatest philosopher. Diogenes's introduction to Platonic thought addresses his reader as an 'enthusiastic Platonist' inviting him to 'eagerly seek out that philosopher's doctrines in preference to all others'.¹⁵ Traversari's own attitude to Plato is perhaps best summarized in his translation of φιλόσοφος to describe Plato at III.47, which he rendered *philosophus summus*. The pagan Diogenes Laertius, master of so much Hellenic thought and wisdom, thus corroborated the Greek and Latin Church Fathers who had so admired Plato, providing Renaissance readers with further evidence of Plato's special apprehension of higher wisdom. Marsilio Ficino would later immerse himself in Traversari's rendering, heavily annotating a manuscript now in the Laurentian Library (MS LXXXIX inf. 48) and paying special attention to accounts of Plato's doctrines on immortality, the Highest Good and to descriptions of the philosopher's personal holiness and 'discernment of the divine life'.¹⁶

¹⁴ Traversari, *Epp.*, XXIII.10, translation from Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers*, p. 75.

¹⁵ Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum*, III.47; translation from R. D. Hicks's edition, Cambridge, 1972; the summary of Platonic philosophy is found at III.47-109.

¹⁶ See *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Mostra di manoscritti, stampe e documenti, 17 maggio-16 giugno 1984*, ed. by S. Gentile, S. Niccoli and P. Viti, Florence, 1984, pp. 11-12, 17-18, 22-23. When Ficino encountered Plato in the original Greek he related to Cosimo how Plato's discussion of the Highest Good excelled *even* Diogenes Laertius's description (underscoring the prior importance of Traversari's translation): 'Invenies longe plane divinius eum quam Laertius Diogenes retulerit de summo

Between 1433 and his death in 1439, the Camaldolese General carried out two other translations of crucial importance to the later Christian Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: the *Theophrastus* of Aeneas of Gaza, and the *Opera* of Dionysius the Areopagite. Aeneas Gazeus's *Theophrastus*, which Traversari translated between 1433 and 1434, is a philosophical dialogue on the immortality of the human soul set in fifth-century Alexandria.¹⁷ Here the speakers address the relationship between Platonic philosophy and Christian Scripture. In the dialogue the speaker, Theophrastus, expounds the doctrines of the *prisci theologi* regarding the human soul, citing the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Eleatics as well as Pythagoreans, Plato, Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus: in sum, the whole Platonic tradition. In the end the speakers renounce the Platonic doctrine of the soul's pre-existence, and yet affirm the soul's immortality as well as the resurrection of body through the grace and power of God, thus achieving a synthesis of Platonic and Christian thought. In May 1456, several years before commencing his translations of the complete works of Plato, Ficino copied in his own hand Traversari's translation of the *Theophrastus*.¹⁸

Between 1436 and 1437 Traversari completed his translations of ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite's *Mystical Theology*, *Divine Names*, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies* and *Celestial Hierarchies*.¹⁹ Dionysius provides one of the keys to Renaissance Platonism in his use of mystical symbolism to evoke the divine realm. His emphasis on higher, intuitive intellection, *noesis*, clearly places the discursive reasoning, so stressed by the schoolmen,

bono sensisse', P. O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2 vols, Florence, 1937, I, p. 37; cf. R. Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, Paris, 1958, p. 263. See also Gigante, 'Ambrogio Traversari interprete di Diogene Laerzio', pp. 370-71.

¹⁷ Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers*, pp. 75-76, suggests that Traversari translated the *Theophrastus* between mid-1434 and early 1435. The translation was first published in Venice in 1513. See Giovanni Mercati, *Ultimi contributi alla storia degli umanisti*, Vatican City, 1939, pp. 26-29, and Gianfranco Fioravanti, 'La traduzione traversariana del "Teofrasto" di Enea di Gaza', in *Ambrogio Traversari nel VI centenario*, pp. 461-72.

¹⁸ Florence, MS Riccardiano 709. 'Yesus. Hic liber est Marsilii Fecini florentini et ab eo scriptus mense maii 1456'. See the catalogue entry in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Mostra*, pp. 15-17, and P. O. Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, 4 vols, Rome, 1956-96, I, pp. 164-65.

¹⁹ Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers*, p. 65. Traversari's autograph translation (Florence, MS Laur. Gaddiano LXXXV) was finished at Fontebuono on 15 April 1436. See *Epp.* VIII.36 to Niccoli (March 1431): 'Ego, Nicolae carissime, Dionysium ut traducere instituerem plurimorum extorsit precas.' See Luiso, *Riordinamento*, p. 15, n. 2, and *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*, 8408-8409, for Bruges and Paris editions of 1479 and 1499.

on a secondary plane. For Dionysius theology, as opposed to logic, 'does not demonstrate the truth, but exposes it nakedly, in symbols, so that the soul, changed by holiness and light, penetrates without the reason into it'.²⁰ While undertaking these translations Traversari sought with the Lord's help 'to enter with Moses into that darkness more full of grace than any light, so that from there I may hear the voice of the Lord'.²¹ After reading Traversari's translation, Ficino later proclaimed that 'surpassing the natural limits of intelligence, Dionysius has penetrated the mysteries of the prophets and the apostles, and taken with that divine madness with which God inebriates his elect, he has revealed to us all the secrets in an adorable form'.²² Ficino often found in Traversari's Areopagite a mystical key to the higher meanings encoded in ancient philosophy, as for example when explaining the mystery of Socratic ignorance in Christian terms.²³ At the end of his life Ficino provided his own Platonizing translation of two works by Dionysius. Yet Traversari's rendering remained throughout the Quattrocento the only Latin source for the fifth-century Christian Platonist, and in Ficino's early years he necessarily relied on it.²⁴

Traversari's Diogenes Laertius revived for the Renaissance world the breadth of Hellenic thought, giving honoured place to the Platonic

²⁰ Dionysius, *Ep.* IX.1 (*Patrologia Graeca*, III, p. 1105). Translation from Philip Sherrard, *Christianity: Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition*, London, 1997, p. 116.

²¹ Traversari, *Epp.* XI.48 (7 Nov. 1432); Charles Trinkaus, *In our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols, Chicago, 1970, II, pp. 596–601; Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers*, p. 161.

²² Ficino, *Opera omnia*, II, p. 1013, *De mystica theologia, Prooemium*: 'Dionysi Dei numen, Theologi veteres et Platonici separatarum mentium extasin et excessum esse putant, quando partim amore nativo, partim instigante Deo, naturales intelligentiae limites supergressae, in amatum Deum mirabiliter transformantur. Ubi novo quodam nectaris haustu et inestimabili gaudio velut ebrie (ut ita dixerim) debacchantur. Hoc igitur Dionysiaco mero Dionysius noster ebrius exultat passim.'

²³ Ficino, *Opera Omnia*, p. 1389, attributes to Socrates the saying 'when conjoined with the body I know nothing in the natural light. By the light of nature, I say, I do not know true being through the mode of affirmation. This kind of knowledge is proper to God... Yet I know many things through a certain way of negation, such as "that God is not a body" rather than what God is...' Translation from Hankins, *Plato*, I, pp. 322–23.

²⁴ Ficino's admiration for and debt to Dionysius is discussed by Marcel, *Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 642–44. See also Marta Cristiani, 'Dionigi dionisiaco: Marsilio Ficino e il *Corpus Dionysianum*', in *Il Neoplatonismo nel Rinascimento*, ed. by Pietro Prini, Rome, 1993, pp. 185–203, and M. J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Florence, 1998, pp. 67–74.

tradition; his *Theophrastus* summarized the similarities and differences between Platonism and Scripture, while the pseudo-Dionysius illuminated the possibility of a systematic Christian Platonic theology. Together these translations provided the foundation for later Florentine Platonists to compare, confront and reconcile Christian and Platonic doctrines. To Ficino, Traversari's translations of these sources of classical and Christian Platonism were decisive influences. As we have seen, Ficino was intimately familiar with all of these works, and each was profoundly important to his understanding of Platonism.

Traversari's translation of these Platonically inspired works was only one part of a much larger programme of the revival of primitive Christianity. From the 1410s until his death he translated some 40 Greek patristic works, including the Platonically inspired Cappadocians, Athanasius of Alexandria and John Climacus. Traversari was also one of the driving forces behind the convocation of the Council of Florence, whose decrees he co-authored with Bessarion of Nicea. Indeed, the reunion of the churches of East and West was one of the governing objectives to which Traversari devoted his scholarly life. From the time of Martin V, the Latin Church had been conducting negotiations with the Greek emperor on possible means of healing the ancient schism between the two Churches. The Council which sought to bring this about, while promoted by Pope Eugenius IV, was funded and organized by Traversari's close friend and Ficino's great patron, Cosimo de' Medici. The Council of Florence symbolized the aspiration for reconciliation between the two sundered halves of Christendom, Greek and Latin: a universal religious peace to achieve, in the words of Nicholas of Cusa, *concordantia catholica* and *pax fidei*. It was Traversari more than any other intellectual of his time who strove to see to it that this reconciliation should be a profound reunion of culture and faith and not simply an administrative decree of a group of hierarchs. By restoring the early Fathers of the East to the Latin West, he sought to revive an era of the Faith in which the Church was undivided, in which the mystical Christianity of the East and the Catholic Faith of the West were one and unsundered.²⁵ It was here, amidst Traversari's theological and diplomatic discussions with the Orthodox delegations, that the Platonic Academy of Marsilio Ficino was first conceived by his friend and patron,

²⁵ On the Council of Florence see J. Gill, *The Council of Florence*, Cambridge, 1959.

Cosimo de' Medici.²⁶ As Ficino later affirmed in the preface to Plotinus, Cosimo's conception of the Platonic Academy was inspired by Gemistos Plethon's disputations during the Council on the Platonic mysteries.²⁷ Plethon may well have expounded Platonic ideas at the Council, where by his own account he was accustomed to give lectures in the palace of Traversari's friend, Cardinal Cesarini. Plethon later composed the famous treatise, *De differentiis Platonis et Aristotelis*, which supported Plato's theory of Ideas against Aristotle's objections, and sought to demonstrate the conformity of Platonic thought and the incompatibility of central Aristotelian doctrines with Christianity.²⁸ Given Cosimo's patronage of, and interest in, Traversari's Christian Platonic translations, Plethon would surely have made an impression on the prudent banker. Yet Ficino's story of the Academy's conception raises a key question: who interpreted for the Latin audience Plethon's mysterious Platonic expositions delivered in Greek? As the foremost Hellenist and official interpreter of the Latin delegation, the possibility of Traversari's interpreting Plethon's expositions for Cosimo and other select friends seems not entirely implausible. On the arrival of the Greeks in Italy in 1438 Traversari enthusiastically related his discovery in the suite of the Byzantine emperor of a 'beautifully written' manuscript of the complete works of Plato²⁹ which he almost certainly would have discussed with Cosimo.³⁰ James

²⁶ On which see most recently *Firenze e il Concilio del 1439: convegno di studi*, 29 novembre–2 dicembre 1989, ed. by Paolo Viti, Florence, 1994.

²⁷ Ficino, *Opera omnia*, p. 1537; on Plethon see F. Masai, *Pléthon et le Platonisme de Mistra*, Paris, 1956, and C. M. Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon, Last of the Hellenes*, Oxford, 1986.

²⁸ Plethon's famous oration at the Council may have been an early version of the *On the Differences between Aristotle and Plato*, translated in Woodhouse, *Plethon*, pp. 191–214. See Ficino, *Opera omnia*, p. 812.

²⁹ See Mercati, *Ultimi contributi*, p. 24 and Hankins, 'Cosimo de' Medici and the "Platonic Academy"', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 53 (1990), pp. 144–62, esp. p. 157. Hankins interprets the story of Cosimo's 'inspiration' with the Academy at the Council of Florence allegorically to refer simply to his acquisition of the Byzantine Plato manuscript from Plethon. Even here on the level of material transmission, we find yet another remarkable link between the higher designs of Traversari and those of Ficino, for it was most likely Traversari (as Hankins himself suggests) who brought the manuscript to Cosimo's attention. Did not Traversari, like Ficino after him, recognize in Plato a philosopher closer to the spirit of the Gospels and to the Fathers than Aristotle?

³⁰ Hankins's argument is based in part on a letter of Traversari to Ugolino Pieruzzi and in part on codicological evidence. Cardinal Bessarion, who studied under Plethon in the 1430s, was known to have made a copy of Plethon's manu-

Hankins persuasively suggests that this manuscript belonged in fact to Plethon, and that, at Traversari's suggestion, Cosimo purchased it to give, two decades later, to Ficino to translate. If this is the case, then Plethon's prized Platonic tome, following Traversari's suggestion, would one day form the basis for the Platonic Academy of Florence.³¹

The 'beautifully written' codex of Plato which Traversari found in the suite of the Byzantine emperor would wait 20 years to be translated by Ficino. Yet the transmission of Platonic ideas through Traversari's teachings and translations yielded fruit much earlier. As early as the 1420s Traversari's convent of S. Maria degli Angeli had become a centre of the *studia humanitatis* reputed throughout Italy.³² Here the Christian Platonism of the Greek Fathers shaped and influenced what was to become the Platonic Academy of Florence. From the surviving correspondence of members of this circle we can envisage lively discussions on the mystical and philosophical works which Traversari was then rendering into Latin, and on newly discovered manuscripts containing the wisdom of classical antiquity.³³ In 1423, on Giovanni Aurispa's return from Constantinople to Venice, Traversari arranged with the Medici a loan of fifty florins to defray the freight charges for 238 Greek manuscripts which Aurispa had conveyed from Byzantium to Italy, including the complete works of Plato, Plotinus and Proclus. Aurispa's collection of Platonist manuscripts became the largest and most important in Italy prior to the Council of Florence.³⁴ In the mid-1420s Traversari borrowed from

script of the works of Plato. Hankins identifies Florence, MS Laur. LXXXV.9 as the manuscript which Cosimo purchased from Plethon and eventually gave to Ficino. This would provide a further link between Cosimo's early patronage of Traversari's Diogenes Laertius translations, and his later patronage of Marsilio Ficino. George Holmes, 'Cosimo and the Popes', in *Cosimo 'il Vecchio' de' Medici, 1389-1464*, ed. by Francis Ames-Lewis, Oxford, 1992, pp. 21-31, at p. 30 suggests a close connection between the Medicean patronage of Traversari and Ficino.

³¹ See Hankins, 'Cosimo de' Medici', p. 157.

³² On Traversari's intellectual circle see Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers*, pp. 28-51, and Arthur Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence*, Princeton, 1988, ch. 10.

³³ Traversari's correspondence with these figures is published by Canneti and Mercati (see nn. 10 and 17 above). See also Girolamo Razzi, *Vite di quattro huomini illustri*, Florence, 1580.

³⁴ *Carteggio di Giovanni Aurispa*, ed. by R. Sabbadini, Rome, 1931, *Epp.* V (11 Feb. 1424); VII (27 Aug. 1424); X (13 Sept. 1424); Traversari, *Epp.*, V.34 (1 Sept. 1424), VIII.39 (2 Sept. 1424); Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers*, pp. 36-37, 231.

Aurispa a volume of Proclus's *Platonic Theology*.³⁵ Thus a wide range of Platonist works were present at the intellectual symposia held at the Angeli some 40 years before Ficino's great project. From this Camaldolese circle radiate numerous links to the Florentine Platonism of the middle and late Quattrocento. Between Traversari's death in 1439 and the rebirth of the Platonic Academy in the West in 1463,³⁶ a number of Traversari's pupils in particular made significant contributions to the philosophical development of Renaissance culture. The students whom Traversari taught Greek included Matteo Palmieri, Lorenzo Pisano, Giannozzo Manetti, Leonardo Dati, and Girolamo Aliotti. The common thread which binds their works together, be it Palmieri's *Città di vita*, Manetti's *Vita Socratis*, or Dati's Platonically inspired *Commentaria*, is a shared blending of the classical with the Christian, an appropriation of the philosophical structures of the pagan world to expound a pre-eminently mystical Christian message. Their approach to the intellectual world thus bears the stamp of the Camaldolese spirituality into which they were initiated by Traversari. The great intellectual movement these men prepared was that of Florentine Christian Platonism.

The intellectual links between Ficino and the Camaldolese manifested themselves in a wide circle of personal relationships of which the Medici connection is but one example. Marsilio's father Dietefeci, physician to Cosimo de' Medici, acted on several occasions as a witness in Camaldolese legal business at S. Maria degli Angeli in the 1420s and 30s, always in the company of members of the Medici household and at the invitation of Traversari.³⁷ Piero Pazzi³⁸ and

³⁵ *Carteggio di Giovanni Aurispa*, Ep. XXXIII (1427).

³⁶ The year Marsilio Ficino began translating Plato, a labour he later says commenced at the time of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's birth.

³⁷ Florence, Archivio di Stato, Notarile Antecosimiano, 16524 (or P239), records of Alessio Pelli (Galluzzi), a private notary who worked for Cosimo from 1425 to 1461. Fols 12 and 25 contain references to Nicolas Ficini and other members of Ficino's family settling business on 29 June 1431 at S. M. degli Angeli. On fol. 158 Dietefeci Ficino, Marsilio's father, Angelo (Picceli), Masso di Antonio Bradagli, Lorenzo de Medici and Antonio Seristori witness the settlement of a dispute on 13 November 1438 at S. Maria degli Angeli. I am indebted for this information to Arthur Field.

³⁸ According to Vespasiano, Piero Pazzi, a handsome and profligate youth, was converted from the pursuit of pleasure to the cultivation of the Muses by Traversari's friend, Niccolò Niccoli. See Vespasiano, *Vite*, II, pp. 309–10. (Vespasiano describes Niccoli as the Socrates of Florence in encouraging youth in the ways of virtue.) Thereafter, Vespasiano writes, Pazzi never lost an hour in the pursuit of learning; and we may assume that around this time Pazzi came into contact with Traversari.

Bartolomeo Valori,³⁹ whose early intellectual friendships and patronage were of such seminal influence on Ficino, were themselves devoted students of Traversari. Cristoforo Landino, another close associate of Ficino, had a cousin Gabriele who was a monk under Traversari at the Angeli. Landino celebrated this family connection with Traversari in a Latin poem. In his commentary on Dante, Landino also described Traversari as among the most eloquent of the Florentines.⁴⁰ Landino's

Pazzi held him in such affection that he asked him to baptize his newborn daughter, which on account of his order's regulations Traversari had to refuse. He nonetheless consoled Pazzi with a long letter expressing his paternal love and care for 'humanissimo Petro', which he compared to Socrates's love for Alcibiades, Augustine's for Licentio, Jerome's for Nepotiano: Traversari, *Epp.* V.36. See Somigli and Bargellini, *Ambrogio Traversari*, pp. 60–61. The General continued to watch Pazzi's progress. In a letter to Niccoli, Traversari mentioned Pazzi's ongoing studies under Tommaso Pontano, whom Niccoli had recommended as Pazzi's house tutor, summarized in Mehus, *Ambrosii Vita*, p. xx. See now Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy*, p. 63. Traversari's letters are XVI.50 and 51. Pazzi would eventually become legate to King Louis XI of France, and was remembered by Vespasiano for the excellent library he collected. Pazzi's friendship and encouragement was a formative influence on the young Marsilio Ficino. By 1451 Ficino himself served as Pazzi's tutor. An important letter from Ficino to Pazzi (one of the few surviving documents from Ficino's so-called 'Epicurean' period) is edited in Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, II, pp. 81–87. In this letter Ficino develops Lucretian and Epicurean themes which would later influence his *De amore*. See Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy*, p. 178; S. Hough, 'An Early Record of Marsilio Ficino', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 30 (1977), pp. 301–04; *Le ricordanze di Giovanni Chellini da San Miniato, medico, mercante e umanista (1425–1457)*, ed. by M. T. Sillano, Milan, 1984, p. 183. Ficino's tone in his correspondence with Pazzi is familiar and confiding, and may well reflect Pazzi's own sympathy for Ficino's philosophical views, a sympathy developed, perhaps, during his youthful friendship with the Camaldolese translator of Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers*.

³⁹ In a letter to Niccolò Valori (1464–1526) thanking him for funding the printing of the *Commentaria in Platonem* (1496), Ficino wrote of the friendship and encouragement he had received decades earlier from Valori's father Bartolomeo, 'vir admodum elegans et, ut ita dixerim, urbis nostrae deliciae', and from his friend Piero Pazzi, 'clarissimo equite', in the earliest years of his Platonic studies in the late 1450s, when 'enarrationibus disputationibusque in Platonem nostris frequenter interfuit, atque omni studio celebravit', Ficino, *Opera omnia*, p. 1136; Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, p. 565. In a catalogue of friends with whom he 'communed in the cultivation of the liberal arts', Ficino places Valori and Pazzi first among his oldest friends and colleagues: *Opera omnia*, p. 936; A. M. Bandini, *Specimen literaturae Florentinae saeculi XV*, 2 vols, Florence, 1748–51, II, pp. 59–60. Both men had been friends and disciples of Ambrogio Traversari at the Angeli in their youth. Together with Peregrino Agli, Benedetto Accolti, and Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici, Pazzi and Valori formed Ficino's intellectual circle during his first translations of the ten dialogues of Plato, completed in 1464. Luca della Robbia described Traversari's formative influence over Valori in Platonic terms: 'non appariva fra loro disgiunta ne anco l'anima dal corpo . . . perche ci cerco sempre la conversazione de' più reputati . . .', quoted in Mehus, *Ambrosii vita*, p. 371.

⁴⁰ In the preface to his influential commentary on (or Platonic allegorization of)

Disputationes Camaldulenses, set in the late 1460s, was the first published Platonic dialogue of the Renaissance.⁴¹ Evoking the aura of ancient eastern monasticism, Landino uses the Greek term ἐρημός to describe the dialogue's setting at the hermitage of Camaldoli. In this Camaldolese setting, Ficino's character discusses the highest good, while 'Alberti' explains that Aeneas's mother and guide, Venus, is none other than Plato's celestial Venus. Aeneas's journey from Troy to Rome involved discerning the higher Venus, which consists in the contemplation of divine beauty, from the lower Venus. Aeneas's devotion to the higher Venus had saved him from Troy's conflagration.⁴² Whether or not the interlocutors in the *Disputationes* ever met at Camaldoli, the theme of Camaldoli as a site for the propagation of the ancient theology is surely significant. Here, the active and contemplative life was embodied in Camaldoli's physical dichotomy of monastery and hermitage; the quest for the highest good in the foundation's *ascesis*; even Landino's interpretation of Virgil in the final book also calls to mind Traversari's translation of Aeneas of Gaza, in which a Christian Aeneas journeys philosophically from pagan Troy [Alexandria] to Christian Rome.⁴³ Moreover, it would

the *Divine Comedy*, Landino praises Ambrogio Traversari 'inter Florentinos eloquentia praestantes'. F. La Brasca, 'Tradition exégétique et vulgarization néo-platonicienne dans la partie doctrinale du commentaire dantesque de Cristoforo Landino', in *Culture et société en Italie du Moyen Age à la Renaissance: hommage à André Rochon*, Paris, 1985, pp. 117–29. Landino's lectures on Dante were directly influenced by Ficino's *Institutiones ad Platonicam disciplinam*. See Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy*, pp. 240–41; Mittarelli and Costadoni, *Annales Camaldulenses*, VII, p. 200. On Gabriele Landino, himself a poet of some note, see Bandini, *Specimen literaturae Florentinae saeculi XV*, I, pp. 36–45, and Mittarelli and Costadoni, *Annales Camaldulenses*, VII, pp. 19, 32, 99, 167, 199. Gabriele's poetic works included verse in honour of Sts Augustine, Jerome and Ambrose, and the beginning of a heroic poem on the war between Florence and Pisa. Traversari's letters to Gabriele are XIV.25 and 30 (6 Nov. 1437).

⁴¹ P. O. Kristeller, 'The Active and Contemplative Life in Renaissance Humanism', *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, IV, pp. 197–214. On the tradition in Plato see A.-J. Festugière, *Contemplation et vie contemplative selon Platon*, Paris, 1950. On this tradition at Camaldoli in the Middle Ages see Benedetto Calati, 'Vita attiva e vita contemplativa: La tradizione patristica nella primitiva legislazione Camaldolese', *Camaldoli*, 33 (1953).

⁴² *Disputationes Camaldulenses* (ed. by Peter Lohe, Florence, 1980), Book III. Cf. Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, II, pp. 716–18.

⁴³ Benedetto Calati, 'La spiritualità del '400 e la tradizione camaldolese', in *Ambrogio Traversari nel VI centenario*, pp. 27–48, sees the debate between the active and contemplative life presented 'quasi "plasticamente" nella comunità del cenobio e dell'Eremito di Camaldoli' (p. 40). The *Disputationes* thus present a humanist synthesis of traditional patristic themes in a Platonic/monastic setting: 'l'unità nel

be difficult to find a contemporary setting more evocative of the groves of Plato, the caves of sibyls and the aura of the ancient world than Camaldoli. The themes which the *Disputationes* introduced to the wider world of Italian humanism in the 1470s—Ficino as inspired Platonic philosopher and Camaldoli as a Platonic setting—became real historical forces over the succeeding decades. In the 1480s Ficino's actual philosophical pursuits again converged with the Camaldolese tradition.

The exact nature of Ficino's mysterious 'Academy' has always intrigued scholars of the Renaissance period. Some have envisaged an institution which met regularly, celebrated Plato's feast day with symposia (as in the *De amore*) and comprised 'members', including Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Lorenzo the Magnificent, Poliziano and Cristoforo Landino, who co-operated throughout their lives in re-establishing Platonic wisdom in the West. Others, like Ficino's biographer Raymond Marcel, have seen in the Academy a more informal group of philosophical friends who formed a 'foyer de vie intérieure'.⁴⁴ Recent scholarship has debated the existence of an institutional association of Platonists around Ficino.⁴⁵ Ficino himself, who often employs allegorical expression, used the term 'Academy' at different times to denote different things, such as, for example, the dialogues of Plato. Yet Ficino's revived 'Academy' did indeed give rise to a group of philosophical friends, united by a shared enthusiasm for Platonic philosophy and mystical Christianity. During the

pluralismo, espressa dalla vita contemplativa ed attiva, configurata concretamente dai cenobiti ed eremiti, che ancora facevano un corpo unico nella comunione ecclesiale monastica' (ibid.). Traversari, dedicating Aeneas's *Theophrastus* to Andreolo Giustiniani in July 1436, compares his own translation from Greek into Latin with pious Aeneas's pilgrimage to Latium: 'Accipies igitur, Andreole vir illustris, Aeneam nostrum iam plane pium, et per te Roma accipiat suae gentis auctorem; qui longe verius de se protestari possit "Sum pius Aeneas" quam ille olim Anchisae filius', *Epp.*, XXIII.10.

⁴⁴ Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, p. 290.

⁴⁵ Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy*, envisages a more institutional gathering of like-minded friends known as the 'Platonic Academy of Florence'. For a different perspective see Hankins, 'Cosimo de' Medici' (n. 29 above) and 'The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 44 (1991), pp. 429–75. Hankins argues that Ficino's references to the 'Academy' are allegorical allusions to Plato's dialogues. Cosimo's 'conception of the Academy' after hearing Plethon's mystical disputations should thus be interpreted as Cosimo's purchase of the complete works of Plato from Plethon. Hankins credits Ambrogio Traversari with having persuaded Cosimo to conduct this more mundane Platonic transaction with Plethon. See Field's paper in this volume.

very years when the so-called Platonic Academy of Florence reached its pinnacle of influence, a kind of institutional association of Platonists convened around Ficino. The *locus* of this 'Academy' was the Camaldolese house of S. Maria degli Angeli.

To Ficino, as to many of his disciples, the ancient theology culminated in spiritual illumination closely resembling, in both form and content, the Christian monastic life.⁴⁶ Echoing the Pythagorean Numenius's famous question 'What else is Plato but Moses speaking Greek?', let us then consider whether the Platonic Academy of Florence was not in fact the Camaldolese order speaking humanist Latin.⁴⁷ We can address this question by considering two kinds of evidence: Ficino's own writings and correspondence and the administrative records and literary productions of the Camaldolese themselves.

Characteristic of Ficino's own testimony is a letter to two friends cured by his spiritual medicines, where Ficino wrote how 'you paid your respects to the Academy, as if it were your own doctor. You then asked for and heard the sound of the lyre and the singing of hymns.'⁴⁸ Ficino's letter of 15 May 1490 to Ermolao Barbaro, similarly describes how, like a monk, he himself sang psalms thrice daily.⁴⁹ More explicit is Ficino's *Oratio in principio lectionis*, where he emphasizes that the sacred philosophy of Plato is best proclaimed in sacred places and before a religious audience. Referring to the use of temples and other holy places for teaching by ancient sages, Ficino commences his oration by emphasizing the appropriateness of the Camaldolese church of S. Maria degli Angeli for the contemplation of Plato:

⁴⁶ For Ficino's disciples, see, for example, Giovanni Nesi's interpretation of the Pythagorean *Symbola* which described them in terms of a monastic, and specifically Camaldolese, rule. See C. S. Celenza's study, *Piety and Pythagoras in Renaissance Florence: The Symbolum Nestorianum* Leiden, etc., 2001.

⁴⁷ See Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, I.22, quoted by Ficino at *Opera omnia*, pp. 866–67.

⁴⁸ The sound of the lyre for Ficino is often equated with the singing of the Psalms. 'I often resort to the solemn sound of the lyre and to singing, to avoid other sensual pleasures entirely. I do it also to banish vexations of both soul and body, and to raise the mind to the highest considerations of God as much as I may. . . . I know that David and Pythagoras taught this above all else and I believe they put it into practice.' Letter I.92 to Antonio Canigiani, *On Music*. Translation from *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, 6 vols to date, London, 1975–, I, pp. 143–44.

⁴⁹ *Opera omnia*, p. 910.

Following as best we may the path trodden by ancient sages, we will therefore follow the holy philosophy of Plato here in this Church. In this seat of the angels [*sedes angelorum*, the name of the monastery] we will contemplate divine truth.⁵⁰

The church to which Ficino here refers may well be, as Michael Allen first suggested, the Rotunda of Brunelleschi, an edifice commissioned by Traversari. Here Ficino delivered Platonic sermons (probably spiritual commentaries on the *Enneads* of Plotinus as well as expositions of Platonic dialogues) to an audience he addresses as his 'dilectissimi fratres'. Referring to the snow-white Camaldolese habit (*candidare* signifies taking Camaldolese vestments), Ficino urges an approach to the divine mysteries with 'candidis mentibus', emphasizing the purifying nature of divine truth. Here at the Angeli, where David's psalter sounded continuously, Ficino harmonized on his Orphic lyre ancient Platonic *sententiae* with monastic hymns to Christ's resurrection. Over a period spanning at least a decade, Ficino's Platonic teachings at the Angeli accompanied the celebration of the monastic offices, and indeed, formed an integral part of the formation of religious brothers at the Camaldolese house.⁵¹

Ficino may have delivered orations at the Angeli on Plato's *Philebus* as early as 1469. In these the philosopher refers to the monastery as 'this celebrated place'.⁵² From the records of the Florentine cathed-

⁵⁰ *Opera omnia*, p. 886: 'Nos igitur antiquorum sapientum vestigia pro viribus observantes, religiosam Platonis nostri Philosophiam in hac media prosequemur Ecclesia. In his sedibus angelorum divinam contemplantur veritatem.' Translation adapted from *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino* (to whose editors I am indebted for sharing the fruits of their forthcoming volume VII) and Marsilio Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. and tr. by Michael J. B. Allen, Berkeley etc., 1975, pp. 9 and 522-23. Allen observes that the words *vestigia* and *media* would be especially appropriate if the *ecclesia* were the Rotunda.

⁵¹ In addition to Ficino's own testimony discussed in the following pages, see especially Paolo Orlandini, *Eptaticum*, written in 1519 and preserved in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Magl. II.158, which describes the Platonic teachings at the Angeli in part VII. See also Orlandini's Platonically inspired poetry in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Conv. Soppr. G4.826, to be dealt with in my book on the Camaldolese order in the Renaissance.

⁵² From Giovanni Corsi's *Vita Marsilii Ficini*, written in 1506, first published by A. M. Bandini in 1771, and republished in Marcel's *Marsilio Ficino*, Appendix I, p. 683, 'Publice itaque eo tempore [in the reign of Piero] Marsilius magna auditorum frequentia Platonis *Philebum* interpretatus est . . .' Translated in *Letters*, III, pp. 135-53. Cf. Allen in Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, pp. 6-9, 522-23. MS Vat. lat. 5953, considered the earliest version of the *Philebus* commentary, refers to 'celebri hoc loco'. For the dating of this piece to 1469 see Allen, *Philebus*, pp. 48-56 and

dral chapter we learn that Ficino preached in the church of S. Maria degli Angeli on every single day of the month of December 1488.⁵³ Ficino's sermons on Paul's letter to the Romans, dating from the 1490s, employ language redolent of the architectural structure of the monastery's Rotunda, beginning the sermons with the following invocation: 'In the centre of the church I shall praise Thee. In the sight of the angels [once again, a reference to the monastery] I shall sing unto Thee.'⁵⁴

Similarly, in a philosophical letter Ficino echoes the psalmist in his reference to a congregation of angelic brethren:

Breathe upon us, I pray, gracious God. I will declare Thy name unto my brethren. In the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee. Before the angels will I sing praise unto Thee.⁵⁵

Throughout the late 1480s and 1490s Ficino delivered numerous Platonic commentaries in the Camaldolese church or cloister. At 'frequent meetings' in the Camaldolese house—*cohortantibus angelis*, 'with the encouragement of angels'—he was accustomed to give Platonic *declamationes* or sermons. In the early 1490s Ficino was persuaded over a dinner in the monastic refectory to undertake a new edition of revised commentaries on Plato's dialogues.⁵⁶ Ficino agreed and the edition which resulted was the *Commentaria in Platonem* published in December 1496. The Platonic expositions Ficino revised or car-

C. Vasoli, 'Marsilio Ficino', in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, XLVII (1997), pp. 378–95, at p. 383.

⁵³ Florence, Archivio capitolare, *Partiti*, M.4, car. 99, b. 9, dic. 1488. Cf. G. B. Picotti, 'Aneddoti Polizianeschi', in *Miscellanea di studi in onore di Pio Carlo Falletti*, Modena, 1914, pp. 433–49, and reprinted in Picotti's *Ricerche umanistiche*, Florence, 1955, p. 136 ff.

⁵⁴ 'Adspira nobis precor Alme Deus, via, veritas, vita, Trinitas unus Deus. In medio ecclesiae laudabo te. In conspectu angelorum psallam tibi', *Opera omnia*, p. 473; Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. Allen, p. 9; the editors of *Letters* observe that *psallo* signifies singing, playing a lyre or psaltery. The invocation is found at the beginning of Ficino's sermons on the immortality of the human soul, on the five loaves, on the two disciples at Emmaus, etc.

⁵⁵ Translation from *Letters*, VII (forthcoming). See Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, I, pp. 20, 93.

⁵⁶ *Opera omnia*, pp. 950–51: 'Marsilius Ficinus Iuliano insigni theologiae professori Ordinis minorum non minori. . . . Novam Platonis interpretationem nondum edidi ultra dimidium iam productam. Ad hanc tu me maxime omnium adhortatus es, forte interim cohortantibus angelis, in quorum aede id in coena mihi persuasisti. Quo tempore post declamationes nostras ibidem frequentibus concionibus tu orabas.' The letter is dated by Marcel several months after 7 November 1492, *Marsile Ficini*, p. 531.

ried out at this time included the *Parmenides*, *Sophist*, *Timaeus*, *Phaedrus*, *Philebus*, and *Republic*.⁵⁷

Ficino's 1496 *Commentaria in Platonem* includes a philosophical letter addressed to his Camaldolese *conphilosophus* or fellow philosopher Paolo Orlandini, a monk at S. Maria degli Angeli.⁵⁸ Dated 13 November 1496, the letter continues a conversation between Ficino and Orlandini at the Angeli on paths of the soul's ascent through intellect (a natural process) and through the will (supernatural). 'In the second case, the case of ecstasy, a new light and power poured in by God . . . kindles the will with a wonderful love . . . drawing the intelligence into God. There love itself, whose function in the universe is generation, regenerates the soul and makes it divine.'⁵⁹ Here we come to appreciate the significance of the Camaldolese context, where such ascent was the continual goal of the brethren. Likewise when Ficino expounded Plato's *Phaedrus* at the Camaldolese monastery in the 1490s and spoke of the chariot of the soul ascending into heaven on the wings of divine love, the monks in his audience must surely have heard resonances of the Desert Fathers, of the ladder of Romuald, and of their own General's translations of Climacus and Dionysius.⁶⁰

Ficino's presence among the Camaldolese left many tangible marks. In 1487, Traversari's successor as Camaldolese General, Pietro Dolfín, described a 'new kind of teaching' which had taken place at the Camaldolese monastery for some time:

⁵⁷ See Allen's critical editions and translations of Ficino commentaries on the *Sophist*, *Phaedrus*, *Philebus* and *Republic* VIII.

⁵⁸ Published with English translation in Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. Allen, pp. 486–89.

⁵⁹ Ficino then lists the works in which he he has addressed this problem: 'Naturalem quidem mentis incesum una cum Platone tractavimus in Philebo, excessum vero naturali motu superiorem attingimus in epistola atque una cum Platone in Phaedro Symposioque tetigimus, et qua ratione divinus amor qui in voluntate accenditur intellectum in unitatem summam transferat qua praecipue Deo fruimur in commentariis in Dionysium declaravimus. Sed haec pro epistolae modo satis', *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. Allen, p. 489.

⁶⁰ For the Camaldolese reception of these teachings see, for example, Orlandini's *Eptathicum*, vol. IV, ch. 3, and Ficino's letter to Orlandini cited above. Other examples of Ficino's use of the ladder metaphor are his three steps of contemplation, contained in his *Argumentum in Platoniam Theologiam: De ascensu (Primus contemplationis gradus)*; *De divina providentia (Secundus contemplationis gradus)* and *De impedimento mentis (Tertius contemplationis gradus)*, *Opera omnia*, pp. 707–17.

I have known for some time that scholars, qualified in various disciplines, have given public lectures in the monastery of the Angels . . . However, up to the day of my recent visit, no one had apprised me of the fact that this kind of lecture took place in the church sanctuary itself.

The General 'strongly approved' of such philosophical pursuits taking place at the Angeli, but was surprised to find the Camaldolese church itself a forum for philosophical enquiry.⁶¹

An inventory of books at the Angeli, compiled in 1513, describes a rich library of Renaissance Platonism full of Ficino's writings and sources.⁶² Ficinian translations in the monastic collections included the Plato, *Opera omnia*, the printed Plotinus, the Aldine edition of Iamblichus's *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum*,⁶³ and early translations of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The monastery also possessed a *Theologia Orphica*, possibly the *Orphic Hymns* which Ficino translated but never disseminated widely.⁶⁴ Ficino's original philosophical works in the library included: *De Christiana religione* (1474), *Theologia Platonica* (1474, ed. pr. 1482), *De vita* (1489), and his commentaries on Plato (1496).

⁶¹ *Petri Delphini Veneti Prioris sacrae Eremitae Generalis totius Ordinis Camaldulensis epistolarum volumen*, Venice, 1524, p. 74, from Camaldoli di Firenze, 7 Dec. 1487; discussed in Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, II, pp. 233–34 and in Marcel, *Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 476–77.

⁶² The inventory, in Florence, Biblioteca Moreniana, MS Palagi 267, fols 34v–41r, is described and printed by Serenella Baldelli Cherubini, 'I manoscritti della biblioteca fiorentina di S. Maria degli Angeli attraverso i suoi inventari', *La Bibliofilia*, 74 (1972), pp. 9–47. The list also contains a number of works by Quattrocento humanists, including Giovanni Nesi, Olivieri of Siena's *De rationali scientia*, Ermolao Barbaro's *Castigationes* of Terence and Pliny, the *Opera* of Pontano, Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*, Giovanni Cortesi, Pietro Crinito, Bartolomeo Scala's *Apologia*, Filippo Beroaldo and the letters of Coluccio Salutati, together with his *De seculo et religione*. See Cherubini, pp. 25–31. Though compiled over a decade after Prior Guido's departure, the inventory is clearly a legacy of the Laurentian era. Prior Guido da Settimo presided over the Angeli from 1487 until 1498. Ficino greeted the Prior as follows: 'et venerabili patri vestro, immo et nostro, Guidoni Laurentino angelicae aedis instauratori nos saepe commenda', *Opera omnia*, pp. 1425–26. On Guido's administration and on his close friendship with Lorenzo de' Medici, see Orlandini's *Eptathicum*, part VII; Mittarelli and Costadoni, *Annales Camaldulenses*, VII, and Dolfin's letters.

⁶³ This edition made available in Latin a remarkable array of ancient Platonists, including Proclus, Porphyry, Synesius, Psellus, Priscian, Alcinous, Speusippus, the sayings attributed to Pythagoras and Xenocrates, as well as Ficino's *De voluptate*. See *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Mostra*, pp. 132–33, and *Aldo Manuzio tipografo*, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana exhibition catalogue, ed. by L. Bigliuzzi et al., Florence, 1994, pp. 45–46.

⁶⁴ *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Mostra*, pp. 25–26.

Nowhere is the convergence between Ficino's Christian Platonism and Camaldolese monasticism more apparent than in the writings of the humanist Paolo Orlandini.⁶⁵ A Camaldolese brother at the Angeli, Orlandini avidly attended Ficino's Platonic expositions and sermons, often describing the Florentine Platonist as his master. Orlandini's corpus applies Ficino's Platonism to the practicalities of Camaldolese life, and is replete with quotations from and references to Plato's dialogues and interpreters. Like Ficino, Orlandini was fascinated with prefigurations of Christianity in the Platonism of antiquity, and received encouragement from Ficino to 'proceed happily' in these philosophical and theological enquiries.⁶⁶ Orlandini likened Ficino's Platonic expositions to a resurrection of the Academy, comparing this heroic deed to Orpheus's rescue of Eurydice and Demeter's rescue of Persephone.⁶⁷ According to Orlandini, Ficino's daily readings from Plato were to be heard by the Camaldolese brethren as their 'daily bread'.⁶⁸ Also like Ficino, Orlandini relied on Traversari's renderings of early Greek Christian Platonists when comparing Platonic ideas with the true faith. In a poem in *terza rima*, he finds himself on Mount Parnassus in the company of the great minds of antiquity. Questioning Pythagoreans, Aristotelians, Epicureans and Stoics on whether the soul is immortal, he receives a different reply from each. He is soothed by the Platonists' affirmation of immortality, but at last finds Ambrogio Traversari, whose translation of Diogenes

⁶⁵ Early sources for Orlandini, in addition to Dolfin's letters, include Fortunio, *Historiarum Camaldulensium libri*; Mittarelli and Costadoni, *Annales Camaldulenses*, VII, pp. 184, 252, 381, 397, 400, 407–08, 411, 415–16, 426–27.; VIII, pp. 17–19; Mehus, *Ambrosii vita*, pp. 281, 313, 365–66, 374–75, 378–79, 384–85, 394–95, 403, 433 ff.; S. Razzi, *Le vite de' santi e beati dell'ordine di Camaldoli*, Florence, 1600, pp. 147–49; Giovanni Crescimbeni, *L'Istoria della volgar poesia*, Rome, 1714; Michele Poccianti, *Catalogus illustrum scriptorum Florentinorum*, Florence, 1589; Antonius Possevinus *Apparatus Sacer*, Book III; Mabillon, *Iter Italicum*, ad ind.

⁶⁶ *Opera omnia*, p. 1426.

⁶⁷ Paolo Orlandini, *Eptathicum*, fols 4v–5r: 'Marsilius noster civis Florentinus Ficini natus: vir profecto eximii ingenii maximaque doctrinae. Qui quidem Minerva sua, suaque Cythara melius quam Orpheus Eurydicem, suamque Proserpinam mater, et Samuelem Phytonissa illam Academiam ipsam ipsumque Platonem ab inferis ad superos videtur revocasse. Quandoquidem ipse et Platonis libros nobis e grecis latinis fecit. Et pro omnibus eius dialogis atque opusculis mira quidem argumenta composuit.'

⁶⁸ *Eptathicum*, fol. 140: De Reverendi praeceptoris nostri, Marsilii scilicet Ficini mandato, nudius tertius mihi indicto, id instituti servabimus, ut in singulis quaestionibus Platonem suum citemus, ac si cotidianum panem pro omni lectione assumendum in isto contubernio. Neque id iniuria. Nostis enim venerandi fratres, praeceptorem iam dictum affici quam plurimum Platoni, quae ipse e greco latinum fecit: deque tenebris ad lucem, atque ab inferis ad superos ferme revocavit.

Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers* had made this encounter possible. Traversari resolves Orlandini's doubts, as Aeneas of Gaza had earlier in the *Theophrastus*, with the Christian affirmation of the resurrection of the body.⁶⁹ Orlandini is greatly comforted, as the immortal soul of the Platonists is here redeemed in the spiritual body of Christ's resurrection. Here Florentine Platonism and Christian orthodoxy converge in the tranquil cloisters of the Angeli.

Paolo Orlandini's writings epitomize the monastic and Christian character of Ficino's Platonic Academy. Themes he addresses include the immortality of the human soul, the active and contemplative lives, the relative superiority of Plato and Aristotle and the divine power of love. Orlandini's corpus is thus characteristic of the lasting testament of Renaissance Platonism to European thought and letters. But his works also clearly place the source of these seminal ideas within the context of the Camaldolese cloister. Here the purpose of philosophical contemplation and mystical wisdom is not pagan refinement and illumination, but union with Jesus Christ, creator, messiah and redeeming principle of the universe. As we have seen from his Parnassian poem mentioned above, Orlandini approached the question of the soul's immortality with personal religious conviction rather than from a detached, philosophical perspective. This is also clear from his other writings. Just as Landino's *Disputationes Camaldulenses* enunciated some of the central themes of Florentine Platonism through the medium of humanist dialogue, Orlandini expresses these themes, such as the active and contemplative lives, as central questions of the Camaldolese monastic vocation.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Conv. Soppr. G4.826 (autograph), *Canto de immortalitate de anime*: 'Incomincia uno breve canto dove si riducono le opinioni de philosophi circa l'immortalita del anima insieme con le ragioni theologice decte per Don Ambrosio Generale fu del nostro ordine et qui sinduce parlare come si puo vedere.' The Parnassian Platonists propound as follows:

Parmi Plotino con faccia iocosa
alludessi con Plato a tal sermone
nel suo Timeo et Phedro in tucta cosa.

Nella Republica anche et nel Phedone
l'alme riduce al cerchio universale
onde han fortuna costumi et ragione.

Et nel Philebo parte corporale
vuole esser parte a tucto l'universo
et l'alme nostre col primo animale.

⁷⁰ See references at n. 41 above.

Within the order, action and contemplation were related to the dichotomy between hermit and coenobite, between the solitary and communal life embodied in the topography of Camaldoli. Philosophically the question of *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* corresponded to the relative superiority of the intellect and the will. Orlandini describes Camaldolese houses throughout the late Quattrocento as living examples of these principles. Here Platonist circles comprising both monks and laity puzzled over such perennial questions in earnest quest of the truth. The discussion at the Angeli between Ficino and Orlandini in November 1496 on the relative merits of the intellect and the will underlines the religious and monastic character of such themes.⁷¹ From a philosophical perspective, Ficino's letter is highly significant, reconciling for the first time two themes of central importance in his Platonic thought. During their philosophical discussion Orlandini had asked Ficino 'with his customary subtlety' why he had given precedence to the will in the letter to Lorenzo de' Medici on happiness, whereas in the commentary on the *Philebus* he had given precedence to the intellect. Ficino begins by affirming the voluntarist position, expressed in his letter to Lorenzo, and ascribes the intellectualist position of the *Philebus* to Plato. However, Ficino doesn't want 'Marsilio's view to differ from Plato's'. Accordingly he describes two apparently distinct ways man ascends to the heights of divinity: the first, by the natural light of philosophy, and the second, through the supernatural ecstasy of divine love.⁷²

⁷¹ See J. Krayer in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. by C. B. Schmitt et al., Cambridge, 1988, p. 353; Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. Allen, pp. 487-89.

⁷² 'Marsilius Ficinus, Florentinus, Paulo Orlandino in angelorum aede monaco conphilosopho suo, salutem.

Postquam heri multa mecum de divinis ut soles subtiliter disputasti, quaesisti denique cur ego in *Philebo* tamquam ex Platonis sententia intellectum voluntati praefererim, cur in epistola de felicitate praeferam voluntatem. Equidem respondere possem in *Philebo* quidem sententiam ferri Platoniam, in epistola vero meam. Sed nolim Marsilianam sententiam a Platonica dissentire. Itaque respondebo summatim, duplicem esse mentis nostrae processum: alterum quidem naturalem, alterum vero supra naturam, quem proprie nominamus excessum. In illo quidem processu intellectus luce quadam naturaliter insita voluntatem ducit quasi comitem; ac denique recte ductam implet, ideoque praeferitur. In hoc autem excessu nova lux virtusque infusa divinitus non prius intellectum divino splendore complet quam amore mirifico accenderit voluntatem. Quae quidem sic accensa per ipsam translatoriam caloris amorisque efficaciam mentem traducit in Deum, ubi amor ipse cuius est in universo generationis officium regenerat animum efficacique divinum.' The letter is edited and translated by Allen in Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, pp. 486-88. For further discussion see Albertini's paper in this volume.

The question Orlandini put to Ficino at the Angeli with his 'customary subtlety' thus reflected a perceptive and not uncritical reading of Ficinian philosophy. In Landino's *Disputationes*, 'Ficinus' had praised the contemplative ascent in the appropriate setting of the hermitage of Camaldoli, where the Platonic ladder became reality in the spiritual exercises of the hermits.⁷³ In his letter to Orlandini, the real Ficino described this Platonic theory of the Intelligence as a 'natural' process and therefore subject to philosophical or rationally comprehensible explanation. The power of Divine Love, however, was supernatural, and its workings could be ascribed only to the highest mysteries of God. Here Ficino transcends the barrier between the philosophical and the religious, maintaining and affirming the supremacy of supernatural Christian Love. The same Christian Platonic concept of the Ladder of Love would recur early in the next century in the works of Pietro Bembo, Francesco da Diaceto and Baldassare Castiglione, all of whom acknowledged a profound debt to Ficino. What is less well-known, but perhaps equally important, is that Bembo, Diaceto and Castiglione all maintained, like Ficino before them, close associations with the Camaldolese. That this convergence between a central stream of Renaissance thought and the Camaldolese order should continue over yet another generation seems altogether extraordinary. A sixteenth-century intellectual heir wrote of these men as having revived Plato's 'most profound theory of true love' which 'forgotten for many centuries except for a few glimpses in the verses of Dante, Petrarch and other older poets' was finally revived by Marsilio Ficino 'in his learned commentary on Plato's *Symposium*' and faithfully perpetuated by Pico, Diaceto and Bembo.⁷⁴

The relative dignity of the will and the intellect, and of the active and contemplative lives, are themes Orlandini addresses throughout his writings. In his early *De virtute* Orlandini describes *voluntas* and

⁷³ Lorenzo il Magnifico had himself addressed the question in his poetic *Altercazione* in which the philosopher 'Marsilius' expounded the joys of detached philosophical contemplation. See J. B. Wadsworth, 'Landino's *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, Ficino's *De Felicitate* and *L'Altercazione* of Lorenzo de' Medici', *Modern Philology*, 50 (1952-53), pp. 23-31; Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. Allen, pp. 35-48; Jill Krave, in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 353.

⁷⁴ Benedetto Varchi, *Lezioni sopra l'amore*, Florence, 1590, pp. 351-52. It is perhaps noteworthy that Varchi himself maintained close ties with the Camaldolese. Connections between the Camaldolese and the continuation of these traditions are discussed in my forthcoming book on the Camaldolese order and the Renaissance.

intelligentia as masculine and feminine components in the rational soul. Female-dominated societies of antiquity, like the Amazons who worshipped the moon as a goddess, obliquely affirmed intellect's supremacy over will. Yet the divine command of *Genesis* 3:13 metaphorically endowed will with mastery over intellect. Among the ancient philosophers, Plato, Socrates, Solon and Pythagoras upheld the primacy of the will.⁷⁵ Plato's works tend towards morals, Socrates gave up speculation on astronomical matters in order to pursue moral philosophy and Solon fathered the laws of the Athenians. That Pythagoras placed greater emphasis on compiling *mores* for mortal men than on contemplation of natural things is recorded by St Jerome's *Contra Jovinianum* and Basil the Great's letter to his nephews. Against objections that Plato seems to prefer the intellect to the will in his *Philebus*, Orlandini replies that here Plato is in fact treating another question. In the *Philebus* where Plato employs the word *intelligence*, intellectual disposition or intellectual appetite should be understood, terms which unite will with reason.⁷⁶ Orlandini later addresses Aristotle, and then Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, on the question of the intellect's superiority. He concludes that the Romualdine school (*nos Romualdini*) diverges on this point from Aristotle and the scholastics, and affirms, like Ficino, the primacy of love which is expressed in action and not in contemplation.⁷⁷

Orlandini's *Decalogus de immortalitate* also devotes a chapter to the question of the relative dignity of the intellect or the will, relating this problem to the immortality of the intellectual soul.⁷⁸ In the

⁷⁵ *Eptathicum*, fol. 23r: 'Ubi sciendum est quod Plato, Socrates, Solon, et Pythagoras pluris fecerunt atque estimaverunt voluntatem ipsam quam intellectum. Nam Plato iugiter in suis libris vergit ad mores. Socrates pro morali philosophiae parte reliquit rerum divinarum speculationem. Solon quoque omissis ceteris leges Atheniensibus aedidit. Pythagoras quoque Samius magis insudavit in componendis mortalium virorum moribus, quam in rerum naturalium contemplatione, prout uberrime narrat ac meminit de ipso Hieronimus contra Jovinianum et Basilius Magnus ad nepotes.'

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 'Siquis vero dixit oppositum haberi posse ex Platonis Philebo, ubi videtur voluntati intellectum praestare praeferrique, dico quod ibi non agitur de quaestione hac. Sed ibi Plato cum intellectum nominat, tu intelligito intellectivum affectum, sive appetitum intellectivum quem eandem appellari voluntatem licet cum ratione coniunctam.' Ficino had similarly explained to Bartolomeo Scala: 'What is carried out in action cannot be performed without an enquiry of the mind', *Opera omnia*, p. 667.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 'Et ideo nos Romualdini ab utraque degredimur schola, Thomae scilicet atque Scoti, ex hoc partim, partimque ex illo accipientes.'

⁷⁸ The chapter concludes 'Charitas autem est nobilissimus habitus, et est in voluntate, ergo nobilissima animi potentia est ipsa voluntas', *Eptathicum*, fol. 192v.

Gymnastica monachorum he devotes three chapters to *declamationes* in praise of the active, the contemplative, the mixed and the solitary lives. These orations are set at the Angeli after vespers, and are delivered by different Camaldolese brethren, each pronouncing the life they praise not only good in itself, but superior to the others (i.e., the active life superior to the contemplative and mixed, and so on). To these Orlandini adds a speech in praise of the solitary life. Here the criterion for assessing the merits of these ways of life is the extent to which each leads to union with the divine through love of God and our neighbour.⁷⁹

Like Ficino, Orlandini and fellow Camaldolese humanists perceived an underlying concord between Platonism and Aristotelianism. Ficino taught that Peripatetic doctrine was the path leading to Platonic wisdom. 'From natural things one ascends to divine things, and this is why no one can ever understand the sublime mysteries of Plato unless he has already been initiated into the disciplines of Aristotle.'⁸⁰ Likewise Orlandini goes to some lengths to emphasize the agreement of Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines, even composing a small oration *Qualis sit convenientia inter Platonem et Aristotelem*.⁸¹ Yet like Ficino again, Orlandini held Plato to be the superior philosopher because of his closer conformity to the teachings of Christ.⁸² Orlandini's commentary on St Jerome's Letter to Paulinus contains a lengthy discussion as to whether Plato was superior to Aristotle and whether pagan philosophers could know the Word of God through the light of natural reason (fols 171r-173r). Treating the first question, Orlandini composes a small treatise on the history of the Plato-Aristotle controversy. Orlandini's treatment ranges from Dante's *Commedia*, which praises Aristotle as 'master of those who know', to Petrarch's *Epistolae* proclaiming Plato superior; from Lactantius's vision of 'Aristotle at variance with himself' and 'Plato who is judged the wisest of all, plainly and openly maintaining the rule of one God' to Cicero's

⁷⁹ 'De vita activa declamatio', fols 246r-247r; 'De vita contemplative declamatio', fols 247r-248v; 'De vita mixta declamatio', fols 248v-249v; 'De vita solitaria declamatio', fols 249v-250r.

⁸⁰ Ficino, *Opera omnia*, p. 953.

⁸¹ *Eptathicum*, 252v-253r (the interlocutor is Diaceto's teacher, Olivieri of Siena); see also fols 4v-5r.

⁸² *Eptathicum*, Diffinitio Augustini de virtute (fols 11v-12r); De impugnationibus contra diffinitionem Augustini (fol. 12r-v); Diffinitio Aristotelis bona, sed Augustini melior (fols 12v-13r); De expositione diffinitionis Augustini (fol. 13r-v); De responsione ad argumenta in oppositum inducta contra Augustinum (fols 13v-14r).

Letters to Atticus where Plato is described as his *dominus*. Orlandini cites Augustine's *Confessions* which honour Plato 'propterea Plato ipse a multis divinus quandoque appellatus est'. The Stoics and Seneca praised Plato, and even Aristotle himself, according to Olympiodorus, called Plato's name holy and sacred. Aristotle composed lauds in Plato's honour, and constructed and consecrated a marble statue of Plato in the temple of Apollo, inscribing beneath the following epitaph: 'Hunc esse illum quem probi homines merito debeant imitare et commendare.' So much for those who accused Aristotle of ingratitude towards his teacher. In summary, the ancient Latins who considered Plato the greatest of all philosophers included Augustine, Jerome, Cicero, Macrobius, Quintilian, Horace and others. Discussing whether the ancient philosophers had approached the knowledge of the Word of God, Orlandini cites Augustine's *Confessions* (VII.20) which attributes to the ancient Platonists the notion 'quod in principio erat verbum'. Plato had himself affirmed in the *Republic*, Book VI, 'Deus bonus filius verbum suum bonum produxit', a sentiment also held by Plotinus and Numenius, according to the tenth chapter of Eusebius's *Praeparatio evangelica*.

The Plato-Aristotle debate recurs in Orlandini's *Gymnastica* as a dialogue set in the prior's apartments at the Angeli between the monk Raphael, Olivieri of Siena (the Aristotelian professor at Pisa who tutored Giovanni de' Medici and Diacceto)⁸³ and Prior Guido. Here Olivieri propounds an Aristotelian-Platonic concordance while Raphael argues for Plato's superiority. Raphael, a Camaldolese Platonist, proceeds to enumerate points, following Bessarion's *In calumniatorem Platonis*, where Aristotle diverged from the faith whereas Plato affirmed it. As proof that his Platonic enthusiasms were in fact Christian in spirit, Orlandini himself employed sayings from pagan (pre-eminently Platonist) philosophers as well as patristic arguments in his studies of Scripture.⁸⁴

⁸³ On Olivieri's influence on Francesco da Diacceto and Francesco Verino, literati often described as members of the Platonic Academy, see Michele Poccianti, *Catalogus scriptorum Florentinorum*, p. 138.

⁸⁴ Orlandini's autograph treatise, dated 8 September 1496 (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Magl. XL.45) has been discussed in the context of late Quattrocento humanist theology by several scholars, including Eugenio Garin, 'Paolo Orlandini poeta e teologo', repr. with additions in *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano*, Florence, 1961, pp. 213-23; Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence*, Princeton, 1970, pp. 316-73; Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545*, Oxford, 1994, pp. 149-53.

At some time after 1500, perhaps after the elevation of Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici as Leo X in March 1513, Paolo Orlandini compiled the *Gymnastica monachorum*, a literary description of what we have ventured to christen the Camaldolese Academy at S. Maria degli Angeli in Florence. A voluminous work, Orlandini here describes the exercises undertaken by the Camaldolese brothers at S. Maria degli Angeli during Guido di Lorenzo's tenure as Prior (1487-98). Orlandini often expresses his devotion to Prior Guido, 'optimum patrem ac praeceptorem meum', remembering his youthful formation at the Angeli as the happiest days of his life. He also expresses his gratitude to Ficino whose works and translations are often cited. Orlandini's *Gymnastica* describes in some detail the humanist/monastic education in which Ficino and Guido played such large parts. The Camaldolese *paedeia* apprehended in Ficino's Platonic teachings, as well as in the writings of numerous other Florentine humanists, was not simply pagan *sententiae* but solid food for the devout Christian seeker. This special formation produced Camaldolese initiates who composed orations on the monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and then participated in humanist dialogues with Laurentian luminaries on the nature of excellence. Here the Platonic Academy of Florence followed the holy teachings of the ancients within the churches and monastic buildings of the Camaldolese.

Orlandini combined his devotion to the Christian Muses and the monastic offices with the administration of the Camaldolese order. He served as prior of S. Maria degli Angeli, Vicar General of the Venetian Congregation and abbot of S. Michele di Murano in Venice in the first decade of the sixteenth century. In these positions Orlandini was able to spread the religious and philosophical message of the Camaldolese Academy to seekers both within and without the order. During this period the Camaldolese order in general, and Paolo Orlandini in particular, constituted a direct link between the Platonist circles of Florence and Venetian humanism in the age of Pietro Bembo and Aldus, the age when Athens moved from Florence to Venice. It was Orlandini's personal intervention, together with Marsilio Ficino's literary influence, that persuaded two aristocratic Venetian humanists, Vincenzo Quirini (re-christened Pietro) and Tommaso Giustiniani (re-christened Paolo) to become hermits at Camaldoli. Both men regarded the Christian Platonic teachings of Paolo Orlandini as a vital source of wisdom and inspiration for their monastic quest.

Soon after Giustiniani's conversion he sent word to Quirini then at the Angeli in Florence: 'The recluse prays and orders you for the love of God to do what you can to bring Paolo Orlandini here, who must become the master and light of all our souls.'⁸⁵

The close relationship between Renaissance Platonism and the Camaldolese order thus did not end with Ficino's death in 1499. Rather, this relationship was perpetuated, self-consciously perhaps, by nearly all of Ficino's immediate successors. These humanists included Ficino's biographer Giovanni Corsi, and the philosopher Francesco Cattani da Diacceto, Ficino's acknowledged successor. In Venice the 'New Academy' of Aldus Manutius became increasingly connected with the Camaldolese order. Five humanists associated with the Aldine circle, Pietro Candido, Eusebio Osorno, Vincenzo Quirini, Tommaso Giustiniani and Paolo Canal either were or became Camaldolese hermits; Pietro Bembo, an Aldine author and editor, made pilgrimages to and corresponded with a holy man at the hermitage of Camaldoli in the Tuscan Apennines; Giovanni Battista Egnazio, an associate of Aldus in the press and an acquaintance of Erasmus, announced his intention to join the order in 1510 together with Quirini and Giustiniani, though he later decided to stay in the world.

Diacceto's literary exchanges with the Camaldolese exemplify this continuing relationship between Platonic Academy and Camaldolese order. This correspondence covered such topics as the motions of the celestial spheres, the imprint of images in matter and concepts within the world soul.⁸⁶ As late as 1515, lamenting the death of the Camaldolese hermit Pietro Quirini, Diacceto wrote to the Superior of the hermitage relating how he had lent Quirini a copy of Proclus's *Elements of Theology*, as well as a treatise by Diacceto himself, *De amore*, 'di mia mano et non legato, elquale è l'archetypo'. Thus the original

⁸⁵ Frascati, Biblioteca dell'Eremo di Tuscolo, MS F I ter, fol. 68r, 10 June 1511, Giustiniani to Quirini; cf. J. Leclercq, *Un Humaniste ermite. Le Bienheureux Paul Giustiniani (1476-1528)*, Rome, 1951, p. 63. I am grateful to the hermits at Frascati who allowed me to consult this correspondence. On Orlandini's activities within the order see Mittarelli and Costadoni, *Annales Camaldulenses*, VII-VIII and Pietro Dolfin's letters.

⁸⁶ *De pulchro libri III*, ed. by S. Matton, Pisa, 1986, pp. 320-27; Kristeller, *Studies*, I, p. 317. See C. S. Lewis, *The Cosmic Trilogy: Perelandra*, London, 1990, p. 328: 'Nay, in the very matter of our world, the traces of the celestial commonwealth are not quite lost.'

of Diacceto's claim to posterity was at the hermitage of Camaldoli 'fra sua altri libri greci'.⁸⁷

Amid our focus on humanist scholarship and Platonic wisdom, little has been said of the central qualities which gave the Camaldolese their distinctive character, continuity as a school, and peculiarity as an order, that is, the mystical spirituality of their religious discipline. Simply focusing on the literary milieu of the order's superiors in Florence and Venice, it is easy to form a one-sided view of the order as a whole. Grounded in the Benedictine rule and recitation of the Psalms, and following a strict observance, a number of Camaldolese houses produced martyrs, saints and hermit confessors whose lives of prayer and work present a marked contrast to the splendid ostentations of the humanist courtiers. And yet somewhere, in a remote cell in the Apennine forests, the two worlds met. To the hermitage of Camaldoli Bembo and Castiglione repaired from the pleasures and Platonic discussions of the court of Urbino and humbled themselves at the feet of a simple hermit to beseech the divine mercy. It was the meeting of this monastic vocation with the Platonist movement which produced such far-reaching effects on the development of Renaissance thought: the order embodied a living bridge between the mystical philosophy of Platonism and faith in Jesus Christ. The meeting of these two worlds is manifest in the Platonic commentaries of Ficino, in the philosophy and poetry of Orlandini, in the *Asolani* of Bembo. While the doctrines of the Florentine Platonists struck a resounding chord among the Camaldolese, the mystical spirituality of the Camaldolese informed and enlivened the Florentine Platonists. This meeting between Platonism and monastic mysticism determined the direction of Camaldolese reformers in the next century, who themselves, in turn, profoundly influenced the Catholic Reformation. When the Camaldolese hermit Paolo Giustiniani spoke of the contemplative ascent in the early sixteenth century, he wrote of contemplation in terms evocative of Plato's cave: 'Thus I am enabled to see a shadow, a remote but clear image of a life which is true life. Then do I scorn the life which is death rather than life, for this earthly life I value only as it helps me to acquire the one true life.'⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Frascati, Biblioteca dell'Eremo di Tuscolo, MS F II bis, f. 208. Ed. by Matton, *De pulchro*, p. 275.

⁸⁸ Frascati, Biblioteca dell'Eremo di Tuscolo, MS F I 47.

MARSILIO FICINO AS A CHRISTIAN THINKER: THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF HIS PLATONISM¹

Jörg Lauster

1. *Introduction*

Five hundred years after Marsilio Ficino's death the celebrations in England, France, Italy and elsewhere have demonstrated once more that Ficino has an honoured place in Western philosophy. Whether the physician of the Medici, the canon of Florence cathedral and the head of a philosophical circle earned this place thanks to his work as translator and commentator of Plato and Plotinus or to his own writings or—as is most likely—to both, depends on one's point of view. It is not advisable to separate these two aspects of Ficino's work. Ficino did not carry through his enormous project of translation and commentary merely to satisfy a philological interest. Rather, he pursued the idea of a Christian Platonism and for that purpose a knowledge of the writings of Plato and Plotinus was indispensable. He gave an exact account of why Christian theology can and should use Platonic reasoning, and developed a theory about the history of revelation in antiquity which allowed him to presume a divine origin for Platonic philosophy,² and which served as an historical argument to demonstrate the affinity of Christianity with Platonism. One of the most important results of this is the way in which Ficino tried to abolish the separation between religion and philosophy with his programme of *docta religio* and *pia philosophia*.³

¹ In the following essay I try to resume the basic results of my research on Ficino's theory of redemption in *Die Erlösungslehre Marsilio Ficanos. Theologiegeschichtliche Aspekte des Renaissanceplatonismus*, Berlin and New York, 1998.

² For this programme, see J. Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Leiden etc., 1990, pp. 282–87 and 460–64; M. J. B. Allen, 'Marsilio Ficino on Plato, the Neoplatonists and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 37 (1984), pp. 555–84, at pp. 582–84 (now in his *Plato's Third Eye: Studies in Marsilio Ficino's Metaphysics and its Sources*, Aldershot, 1995); and especially idem, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Florence, 1998.

³ Cf. Marsilio Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basel, 1576;

In developing this programme Ficino naturally had to deal with theological questions that the tradition of Christian thinking presented. Nearly everywhere in his work are allusions, passages and even treatises reflecting his engagement with Christian theology.⁴ Some writings, moreover, are so dominated by these themes that we can simply call them theological works. The foremost piece is, of course, *De Christiana religione*, Ficino's great apology for the Christian religion. In the first part of the work, in addition to his famous remarks on the relationship between philosophy and religion, he explains how the authority of the Christian religion can be upheld with good reasons against the Jews and Moslems. The second part argues in detail against the criticism and rejection of particular Christian doctrines, for example, the theory of the Trinity or the Incarnation.⁵ Ficino treats theological questions repeatedly in his twelve books of letters, especially in Book II. Among these letters *De raptu Pauli* should be especially noted. Here Ficino uses the example of St Paul's *raptus* to heaven to explain his theory of the soul's ascent to God through the various cosmic degrees. In the *Opera omnia* we also find a collection of sermons, the *Praedicationes*, in which Ficino discusses very detailed problems of Christian theology, as, for example, the resurrection of the body or the doctrine of the Sacraments. Finally, Ficino wrote a commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. This work exists only as a fragment, the commentary coming to a premature end at Rom. 5:12. The reason for that rupture may have been Ficino's death. At least we can say that it is one of his latest works. Allusions suggest that he intended to comment on all the letters of St Paul.⁶ If Ficino

repr. Turin, 1959 etc., p. 1. Among the large number of contributions to this theme, see esp. P. O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by V. Conant, New York, 1943; repr. Gloucester, Mass., 1964, pp. 320–23; W. Dress, *Die Mystik des Marsilio Ficino*, Leipzig and Berlin, 1929, pp. 136–38; C. Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness. Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, London and Chicago, 1970; repr. Notre Dame, Ind., 1995, pp. 734–37; C. Vasoli, 'Ficino e il *De christiana religione*', in his *Filosofia e religione nella cultura del Rinascimento*, Naples, 1988, pp. 30–36.

⁴ It may not be superfluous to mention that I am using here and in what follows the modern conception of theology as reflection on the concerns of the Christian religion, and not the conception of Ficino himself, who could call his main philosophical work *Theologia Platonica*.

⁵ Cesare Vasoli has demonstrated that Ficino wrote a 'philosophical' first part and then compiled a second from the texts of various medieval theologians, particularly Paul of Burgos; see C. Vasoli, 'Per le fonti del *De christiana religione* di Marsilio Ficino', *Rinascimento*, 2a ser., 28 (1988), pp. 135–233.

⁶ Cf. *Opera omnia*, pp. 425 and 433; cf. P. O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2 vols, Florence, 1937, I, p. lxxxii.

had completed the project, this commentary would have been as important as his other commentaries on Plato, Plotinus and Ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite. It leaves a variety of impressions. Ficino demonstrates his excellent philological gifts in the handling of the Vulgate, he comes up with surprising and original solutions to dogmatic problems in deep philosophical and theological passages, and yet at other times he acts simply as a copyist, if not a plagiarist, of Thomas Aquinas's commentary. Naturally this mixture has caused and still causes different evaluations.⁷ In any event, Ficino's preoccupation with St Paul represents an interesting form of Paulinism. For Ficino the central position of St Paul among the other Apostles is unquestionable. He sees in Paul a Christian philosopher and an exemplary person who demonstrated with his life the ascent of man to God, a kind of Christian sage with an extraordinary knowledge of revelation.

Even though there is quite enough evidence in Ficino's work to allow us to call him a Christian thinker, discussions of Ficino's theological position are few, at least compared to the number of philosophical and historical investigations. Looking for Ficino in theological manuals is generally a fruitless task. This may simply illustrate the fact that the early Renaissance does not play a great role in the historical self-understanding of Catholic and Protestant theology. Nevertheless, two monographs in the first half of the twentieth century must be mentioned. The German Lutheran Walter Dress published *Die Mystik des Marsilio Ficino* in 1929, and eight years later the Italian Catholic Giuseppe Anichini published *L'umanesimo e il problema della salvezza in Marsilio Ficino*. In both works the confessional background is very important, and this means that for Dress, Luther and for Anichini, Thomas Aquinas were the decisive figures against whom to measure Ficino. In those circumstances it is not surprising that Ficino failed to satisfy either of them. From an historical point of view we might be justified in emphasizing the differences, but to do so would not be particularly helpful for understanding Ficino's theology. In any case, Ficino understood himself to be a Christian thinker and so hermeneutic charity requires us to measure him by the standard which he was claiming for himself and not by confessional apologetics.

⁷ For an overview of the various opinions, see Lauster, *Die Erlösungslehre Marsilio Ficanos*, pp. 26-27.

The following reflections aim to illustrate aspects of Ficino's theology following a system which we do not find in Ficino but which is helpful in putting his thoughts in a theological perspective. The starting point is Ficino's view of man and especially his theory of sin. I deal next with his understanding of the person of Jesus Christ and then with his theory of redemption which means his concept of the ascent of man to God. Finally I shall examine Ficino's eschatology.

2. *The View of Man and the Theory of Sin*

Ficino's anthropology is psychology in the proper sense of the word, meaning that his theory of the soul is the foundation of his view of man. Transforming the Neoplatonic hierarchy of being, Ficino created his cosmology on the basis of the theory of the five substances. The order of Being consists of the intelligible sphere in God, as the highest extreme, followed by Angel, Soul and then downwards to the material sphere, Quality and Body.⁸ In this order, the central position of the soul is the most striking part of Ficino's transformation of Platonic and especially Plotinian cosmology. In some famous and often quoted words from the *Theologia Platonica*, he emphasizes the middle position of the soul in the Universe. He calls the soul 'quoddam vinculum utrorumque'⁹ and 'centrum naturae, universorum medium, mundi series, vultus omnium nodusque et copula mundi'.¹⁰ This description is not a static localization of but the ontological background for the special function of the soul, which consists in mediating between the divine and the material sphere of the cosmos.¹¹ Such a role as mediator has, of course, an unalterable presupposition that there exists in the soul itself a kind of double reference to the intelligible and to the material world. As an explanation of this double inclination Ficino develops his doctrine of the *appetitus*

⁸ Cf. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 106–09; M. J. B. Allen, 'Ficino's Theory of the Five Substances and the Neoplatonists' *Parmenides*', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 12 (1982), pp. 19–44; Charles Lohr, 'Metaphysics', in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. by C. B. Schmitt et al., Cambridge, 1988, pp. 535–638, at pp. 572–73.

⁹ *Theologia Platonica*, III.2 (*Théologie platonicienne de l'immortalité des âmes*, ed. and tr. by Raymond Marcel, 3 vols, Paris, 1964–70, I, p. 138).

¹⁰ *Ibid.* (ed. Marcel, I, p. 142).

¹¹ Cf. 'Similiter oportet essentiam tertiam et divinis simul haerere, et implere mortalia', *Theologia Platonica*, III.2 (ed. Marcel, I, p. 139).

naturalis.¹² In a complex transformation of the Platonic, Neoplatonic and above all Aristotelian theories, Ficino discerns three basic abilities (*vires*) in the soul: the *mens* as the *vis intellectualis*, the *ratio*, and the *vires inferiores* such as the *nutriendi virtus*, meaning the capacity to animate and keep alive the material body. These abilities are a micro-cosmic representation of the intelligible and material sphere of the cosmos in the human soul. In this context the double tendency of the soul is nothing but the double movement of the *ratio* up to the *mens* and down to the *vires inferiores*. In this double movement the *ratio* connects both powers and generates the unity of the soul. Moreover, with its affinity for the divine and its inclination towards the material, the soul connects in its central position the extremes of the universe. Thus both aspects of the soul, its affinity to God and its inclination towards the body, determine Ficino's anthropology.

From a theological perspective, we may note that this double structure of the soul is the foundation of Ficino's description of the ambivalent position of man. Both splendour and misery belong to human existence. Ficino derives the sublimity of man from the special relationship between the soul and God in the order of the cosmos. In this context we find the concept of *dignitas hominis* and the idea of man as *imago Dei*. Both concepts are based on Ficino's theory of the divinity of the soul. For that he falls back on the Neoplatonic conception of emanation and return. The human *mens* emerges from the divine *mens* which it has at the same time as its final aim. So the soul takes part in the circle of divine emanation. For a more detailed description of this circle Ficino applies the Platonic metaphors of light. He characterizes the human *mens* as a ray (*radius*) of the divine Spirit, which descends into the soul, and from there ascends again back to God. It is a kind of reflection that makes the soul the mirror of God. In a very important passage of *De raptu Pauli*, Ficino writes:

Vides, o mea mens, vides esse te Dei speculum quando intelligentiae tuae radii in eum ab eo immissi resiliunt. Si eius speculum es (ut es absque dubio) quandoquidem eum in te specularis teque in eo, sequitur ut quid ex Deo infra te vestigium quoddam dumtaxat est et umbra, id in te imago Dei similitudoque sit expressior, ut merito dictum sit ad imaginem similitudinemque Dei te esse creatam.¹³

¹² Cf. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, p. 171 ff.

¹³ *Opera omnia*, p. 705 (also printed in Marcel's edition of the *Theologia Platonica*, III, p. 365).

Obviously these arguments are very important for Ficino's theological anthropology. He uses the metaphor of the soul as a mirror of God to describe the quality of the soul as a trace (*vestigium*) of God and then as an image and likeness of God. The terms *imago* and *similitudo* refer to the inner coherence between the divine and human *mens*. The double aspect of Ficino's concept of the divinity of the soul in his interpretation of man as an image of God is the main issue. On the one hand the expressions 'image' and 'likeness' signify a special element of the essence of man; on the other hand there is also an anticipatory meaning when—in the context of his theory of the human affinity to God—Ficino understands the fulfilment of this affinity as being our deification and gradual assimilation to the image of God. Finally we can see that the concept of man as image of God, which plays such a prominent role in Renaissance thought,¹⁴ is another central element in Ficino's anthropology. By integrating the doctrine into his Neoplatonic-influenced cosmology and theory of the soul, however, Ficino gives the argument a metaphysical foundation. It is a striking fact, incidentally, that Ficino has no regard for the usual scholastic distinction between *imago* and *similitudo*, although we can be sure that he was a connoisseur of Thomas Aquinas's writings. The scholastic theologians had introduced this distinction for the purpose of describing the situation of man after the Fall: *imago* defines human nature after the Fall, whereas *similitudo* should express the supranatural gift of grace (*donum superadditum*). But this basic distinction between nature and grace was for Ficino incompatible with his interpretation of man as an image of God. In his understanding a supranatural perfection through God's grace is unnecessary, because the nature of man is itself the product of the emanation of God into man.

As a result of this theory the familiar question whether religion is a natural or a divine fact is not really of concern to Ficino. Religion is the particular sign of man; it is the elevation of mind to God (*mentis in Deum erectio*) and the contemplation of the divine sphere (*contemplatio divinatorum*).¹⁵ Therefore religion is a natural and necessary part of human nature. Ficino goes so far as to describe religion as something like an instinct for God. Religion, however, is also divine, because it is caused in man by the divine light. The religious ele-

¹⁴ See Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, pp. xx–xxi.

¹⁵ Cf. *Opera omnia*, p. 2, and *Theologia Platonica*, XIV.9 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 280).

vation of the human mind to God is for Ficino not a self-made illusion but the effect of the divine mind on the human mind. So religion is—as Ficino clearly declares in a sermon—that which makes the difference between man and animal. Therefore religion is both natural and divine:

Praeterea si homo, ut multis rationibus confirmatur, est animalium perfectissimus, per eam praecipue partem facultatemque perfectissimus est, quam habet ipse propriam, caeteris animantibus nullo modo communem. Haec sola religio est. . . . Cum vero etiam maxime omnium sit [fit *edn*] communis et firma, sequitur ut maxime omnium sit naturalis. Et quia instigante Deo rudibus statim hominibus est inserta, non solum maxime naturalis est, sed etiam divina quam maxime.¹⁶

Apart from Ficino's concept of religion as the affinity of the soul for God, the other important feature of his anthropology is his theory of the inclination of the soul towards the body. This theory constitutes an important factor in Ficino's cosmology since it is the background for the function of the soul in the process of mediating between the two parts of the universe. Through union with the body, the soul communicates and passes on the principles and laws of the divine and immaterial sphere to the sensible and material sphere of the cosmos, that is the principles of the divine and immaterial sphere. It is this achievement of connection and guidance which gives sense to the earthly existence of man. The soul has to care for the body and the material sphere. Indeed, Ficino interprets this kind of care as an imitation of the *divina providentia*.¹⁷ He emphasizes with a lot of feeling the role of men as *Dei vicarii in terra*¹⁸ or as *in terris sacerdotes*;¹⁹ he even says about man: 'Est utique deus in terris'.²⁰ Using this power man acts on earth as the subduer of nature and the founder of culture. All this makes clear that for Ficino the union between soul and body is very important and significant for the order of the universe.

For Ficino, man could and should be like God on earth, but that does not mean that he is so automatically. Ficino knew very well that in reality man can hardly fulfil this lofty role. One of the most

¹⁶ *Opera omnia*, pp. 473–74.

¹⁷ E.g. *Theologia Platonica*, XVI.6 (ed. Marcel, III, p. 130 f.).

¹⁸ *Theologia Platonica*, XVI.7 (ed. Marcel, III, p. 142).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* (ed. Marcel, III, p. 135).

²⁰ *Theologia Platonica*, XVI.6 (ed. Marcel, III, p. 129).

common prejudices of students of humanism and the Renaissance is to argue that Renaissance philosophers tended to overestimate human powers. Theological research especially has come to the conclusion that in Renaissance thought there is no place for the Christian doctrine of sin. Dress and Anichini expressly argued this in the case of Ficino.²¹ But these philosophical and theological clichés do not apply to his thinking. In his phenomenological analysis of human life, Ficino sees very clearly the infirmity of man. In its care and guidance of the material world, the soul has to struggle with a number of serious obstacles. The finiteness of bodily existence involves a vague feeling of discontent and sadness. Given its infinite and divine orientation, the soul cannot achieve fulfilment with mortal goods; it can never find rest during earthly existence: 'Quamobrem homo solus in praesenti hoc vivendi habitu quiescit numquam, solus hoc loco non est contentus.'²² So the union of soul and body gives human life a heroic element: soul is on trial on the borderline between the immortal and mortal part of the cosmos.

This is the context for Ficino's theory of sin. The fact that the soul can give up its proper task and succumb to material influence is what Ficino calls sin, although he is not committed to any specific term. He names it *peccatum* or *vitium*, or he describes it as an unspecific failing. This happens when the inclination of the soul towards the body changes into an independent and obstinate attitude.²³ It is not the inclination towards the body as such that Ficino calls sin but when that inclination excludes the divine and intellectual affinity of the soul. The soul turns away from God and gives up its divine destination. Thus sin is a kind of perversion of the cosmic order. In *De Christiana religione* in particular, Ficino also describes this condition by the biblical metaphors that played such a prominent role in the Christian doctrine of sin. So he speaks of the rebellion of our first parent, which consists in the struggle of the soul against God: 'Rebel-

²¹ Cf. Dress, *Die Mystik des Marsilio Ficino*, p. 132: 'Für die Tatsachen des Bösen, der Sünde und der Schuld hat Ficino gar kein Verständnis', and G. Anichini, *L'umanesimo e il problema della salvezza in Marsilio Ficino*, Milan, 1937, p. 99: 'Ciò viene sempre dalla poca intelligenza che il Ficino ha della dottrina cristiana.'

²² *Theologia Platonica*, XIV.7 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 270).

²³ Cf. for example *Theologia Platonica*, XVI.7 (ed. Marcel, III, p. 138): 'Ex diuturna declinatione habitum sibi ipsi contrahit proclivius inclinandi. Habitum huiusmodi vitium, immo etiam quemdam, ut ita dixerim, interitum appellamus.' See also *Opera omnia*, p. 63.

lavit a Deo primi parentis animus, rebellavit corpus ac sensus ab eo, rebellio prima peccatum fuit, secunda poena quaedam peccati fuit atque peccatum, quoniam rationi derogavit et Deo.²⁴ It is interesting to see how Ficino tries to reinterpret the traditional Christian idea of sin in the light of his own cosmological and anthropological theory. We find this tendency again in one of Ficino's latest works, in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. Here he follows primarily the dogmatic tradition and he uses fewer biblical metaphors, calling sin *amor sui* and *superbia* in line with Augustine's teaching. Ficino interprets these terms as the intention of the soul to rest in itself. It is a kind of self-realization, which leaves out of consideration that any realization of the soul consists in its divine and ideal destination.²⁵ Indeed, we can see in this theory an attempt to present a plausible conception of sin by philosophical—that means, in particular, Platonic—reasons. Dealing with the doctrine of sin Ficino follows two opposite strategies. Hints allow us to understand his theory of sin in the sense that a perverted inclination for the material sphere can be found in all human beings. According to this interpretation original sin is less an historical event and more a structural phenomenon. This would be a rather modern understanding of original sin, which may in the final analysis make Ficino appear a forerunner of such modern Protestant thinkers as Schleiermacher and Ritschl. But it should at least be mentioned that we can find in Ficino traces of the rationalization of the doctrine of original sin.

For the most part Ficino follows another path. In *De Christiana religione*, as well as in the commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (especially in the interpretation of Romans 5:12, the *locus classicus* since Augustine), Ficino follows scholastic theory as found in Thomas Aquinas. It is obvious that in the first place he wished to give a dogmatically correct version of the theory of original sin, and that tends to make him dependent on Thomas Aquinas. In the passages referring to original sin, he summarizes and reproduces the phraseology of Thomas's commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. Thomas's theory, which is mainly an interpretation of Augustine, could not of

²⁴ *Opera omnia*, p. 23.

²⁵ 'Animus autem qui primum in seipso quiescere tentat, ob hanc iniustitiam nec assequitur Deum neque seipso fruitur, quia caret idea quae verus animus est et in qua animus conformatur', *Opera omnia*, p. 439.

course easily be brought into line with Ficino's own Platonic interpretation. In summarizing Thomas, Ficino inevitably produced tensions, even contradictions, within his own system. This, however, he tolerates even as he tries to avoid theologically awkward questions.²⁶

But quite apart from this problem, we can see that Ficino tries to give a plausible interpretation to the theory of sin by using a Platonic approach. This also includes the consequences of sin. For Ficino sin is a perversion of the original destination and orientation of man, but it is not a total destruction of his capacity. Nevertheless the perversion is so deep that man cannot return by his own power to his divine orientation. The process of deification by which man fulfils his supreme goal cannot be performed by man alone. It is important to emphasize this, because we can see clearly that Ficino's theory of redemption and deification has nothing to do with the heretical construct of self-redemption, self-elevation or self-realization. The process of deification is caused by God and this leads us to Ficino's Christology.

3. *The Person of Christ*

Ficino's treatises concerning Christology do not occupy a central position in his oeuvre. But this observation should not lead to false conclusions. In the bulk of his writings he is dealing with philosophical problems and for that reason there are not many points of contact with Christological issues. This initial impression changes when we turn to his theological works. In the sermons, in the commentary on the Epistle to the Romans and especially in *De Christiana religione* he touches on Christology. For Ficino the authority of the Christian religion depends absolutely on the person of Jesus Christ. Every attempt to understand Christianity has to start with Jesus Christ. He begins his argument with reflections on the doctrine of the Trinity. Following the dogmatic tradition Ficino tries to verify the divinity of Christ with a Trinitarian argument. The starting point is his theory of *generatio*. For Ficino *generatio* is the productive principle of every form of life. Naturally the highest form of *generatio* belongs

²⁶ To give just one example, we cannot find in Ficino any hint as to how he wants to bring together his strictly creationist position (where God creates every individual soul) and the idea of a biological transference of original sin.

to the highest form of life in the cosmic order, and this is, according to his doctrine of the five substances, God himself. In God *generatio* is purely immaterial. The act of generation is the self-thinking of God. Since in God *intelligere* and *esse* are identical—Ficino accepts this important idea of Thomas Aquinas—God does not only think His perfect image, He is His perfect image and this constitutes the ideal conception of the whole cosmos in God himself.²⁷ This ideal conception of reality as the product of the self-thinking of God Ficino calls ‘mundani vero architecti ratio et intelligibile verbum’,²⁸ which God uses as an instrument in the act of creation of the world. With the participation of the Son in the creation as an ideal prototype Ficino introduces the theory of Christ mediating the creation (*Schöpfungsmittlerschaft Christi*), which plays a leading role in his concept of redemption.

Ficino’s theory of generation is quite an original contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity. Influenced by Neoplatonism, the idea of generation does not merely have the function of a theoretical weapon against the Arian theory of creation as the form of production in God, but also leads Ficino to see generation as the causative principle of the entire cosmos, the ideal ground of reality which emerges from God. It is worth mentioning that like every emanationist concept, Ficino’s theory raises the question whether God acts in this generation of necessity or freely. Nevertheless it is quite an interesting contribution to the problem in that it highlights the cosmological aspects of Christ as *Logos* of the world. There are, in short, good reasons for Kristeller’s statement that with this theory ‘a metaphysical interpretation of the Trinity is outlined’.²⁹ It is also interesting to see that Ficino deals in the commentary on the Epistle to the Romans and in other writings with the relation between the Platonic enigma of the three causalities and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.³⁰ Ficino did not go so far as to identify Plato’s three causes

²⁷ ‘Quamobrem divina vita, quia eminentissima est et foecundissima omnium, multo magis prolem sui simillimam quam reliqua generat, ac eam in se generat, priusquam pariat, extra generat, inquam, intelligendo, prout perfecte Deus intelligendo seipsum et in seipso omnia, perfectam totius sui et omnium notionem concipit in se ipse, quae quidem aequalis plenaque Dei imago est, et exemplar mundi superplenum’, *Opera omnia*, p. 18.

²⁸ *Opera omnia*, p. 20.

²⁹ Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, p. 139.

³⁰ Cf. ‘Triplicem hunc ordinem causae penes Deum Plato noster regi Dionysio declaravit, exemplar quidem dum inquit, ex ipso et per ipsum et in ipsum omnia.

with the doctrine of the Trinity, but his view of the Platonic formula makes it clear that he saw in the doctrine of Plato the most complete indication and anticipation of the Christian revelation.³¹

The foundation of Ficino's Christology is the idea of Incarnation. Ficino here takes up the Christology of the Greek Church Fathers, which he tries to merge with Neoplatonic cosmology. Ficino thinks of the act of Incarnation as the descent of the pre-existent Logos into the sensible world. The reason for that act is the quality of God as 'bonum diffusivum sui'.³² The Incarnation is the highest form of divine self-disposing and is strictly connected with Ficino's concept of redemption. God in His goodness became man so that man could become God. The Incarnation is an indispensable presupposition for achieving the final destination of man. In the context of Ficino's cosmology it is important that God presents Himself in a material manner. The presentation of the divine sphere in the sensibly perceptible person of Christ abolishes the perverted orientation of the soul towards the sensible and material sphere. Ficino calls that act the reformation of the soul. After the Fall, man lost his original formation. That makes a new formation necessary, a reformation. This can only happen through the original principle of formation and this is the pre-existent Christ as the *intelligibile verbum* of the creation: 'Once men were formed through the Divine Word, through the same Divine Word they had to be reformed'.³³ This reformation makes the ascent of the soul towards God possible and establishes the basis for redemption. Unlike the case with creation, this corrective reforming implies another form of appearance of the *verbum*. In renewing the *sensibilia* it has to become *verbum sensibile*: 'Ita per verbum quoddammodo iam sensibile factum sensibilia reformare'.³⁴ Due to the central position of man in the cosmic order, the becoming-sensible of God can only be the Incarnation into man. Man as the centre, which includes all,

Ex ipso efficientem, per ipsum exemplarem, in ipsum finalem causam nobis exprimens', *Opera omnia*, p. 437.

³¹ See in detail Allen, 'Marsilio Ficino on Plato, the Neoplatonists and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity', pp. 578–79, and E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, rev. edn, London and New York, 1968, pp. 241–44. Wind's interpretation, however, that Ficino tries to identify the Platonic forms and the Christian theory of the Trinity does not really fit what the texts say.

³² Cf. *Opera omnia*, pp. 20, 21.

³³ 'Per Dei verbum formati quondam homines fuerant, per verbum idem reformari debebant', *Opera omnia*, p. 20.

³⁴ *Opera omnia*, p. 22.

is the only possible point for mediating the extremes of the hierarchy of the universe.³⁵ This combination of the theory of Incarnation with Ficino's doctrine of the central position of man gives the idea of redemption a peculiar cosmic aspect. It is Ficino's cosmic anthropocentrism which constitutes the foundation for a theory of Incarnation which connects the redemption of man with the perfection of creation. This has some far-reaching consequences. The redemption of man cannot be understood as a negation of the secular, but as a process that elevates the secular. Therefore redemption is the principle of God's acting which leads the whole cosmos towards its original destination.³⁶ The classic question of how the union of both natures occurs in Christ appears less appealing to Ficino. Of course, he was aware of the dogmatic decision of the Council of Chalcedon and the medieval and scholastic interpretations. In his explanation on this point he largely follows Thomas's *Summa contra gentiles*, with one striking exception. Radically departing from tradition, Ficino speaks of three natures in Christ: 'As in the Trinity three persons exist in one nature, so in Christ one person exists in three natures, God, soul and body.'³⁷

The reasons for this deviation can be found most easily in his Platonic presuppositions. The union of the extremes of God and body from a Neoplatonic point of view is not possible without mediation. As pointed out above, this is such an important idea for Ficino that he introduces it into the traditional Christological doctrine. According to his anthropology, man is something composed of soul and body, but not merely an amalgam of two parts: he is the union of two totally different degrees in the order of being. This may be the reason why Ficino emphasizes the soul and the body as men's own natures. The Incarnation is then the highest case of connecting the extremes of the universe: through the soul the extremes of God and body are connected. Consequently it is probable that Ficino introduced this idea of the three natures in Christ in order to combine the theory of Incarnation with the anthropological and cosmological presuppositions of his own system.

³⁵ Cf. *Opera omnia*, p. 20.

³⁶ Cf. E. Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*, 6th edn, Darmstadt, 1987, p. 70.

³⁷ 'Sicut ergo in trinitate tres personae in eadem natura existunt, sic in Christo persona una in tribus existit naturis, Deo animoque et corpore', *Opera omnia*, p. 21.

Ficino describes Christ's acting as redeemer with the words, 'Christus est idea et exemplar virtutum'.³⁸ This phrase is in fact a compact summary of his Christology. According to this conception, Christ is—in a metaphysical and not only a moral sense—the highest and most perfect realization of the ideal and exemplary destination of man. As *vitae magister* Christ discloses the divine sphere through the example of his life and through his teaching. Ficino calls this process revelation. As a sensibly perceptible person, Christ seizes the soul and thus reforms the lost orientation of the soul towards God. The presence of the divine in Christ is the foundation for the connection between the soul and God. Being divinely influenced through Christ is the decisive impulse for the soul's ascent to God and creates those forces which move the soul towards God.

Ficino conspicuously neglects certain basic elements of the Christian doctrine of Christ. The Cross of Christ, the Atonement of human sin and the Resurrection have no important roles in his thought. Of course, Ficino knew these standard themes and we do find some scattered remarks on them, where he is evidently following the medieval theologians, sometimes word for word.³⁹ We can again recognize his intention to give a dogmatically correct version, even if this does not correspond with his own opinion. Obviously he prefers to avoid contradictions by passing over difficult questions. In fact, Ficino's own Christology, especially his theory of deification, is closer to the Greek Church Fathers, even when he is quoting Thomas and other medieval thinkers.⁴⁰

4. *The Theory of Redemption*

Anthropology and Christology constitute the theoretical foundation on which Ficino builds his conception of Redemption as the ascent of the soul to God. In describing this process, he elaborates on four

³⁸ *Opera omnia*, p. 22.

³⁹ See for example for Ficino's dependence on Paul of Burgos regarding the doctrine of Atonement, Vasoli, 'Per le fonti del *De christiana religione*', pp. 206–10.

⁴⁰ See in detail Lauster, *Die Erlösungslehre Marsilio Ficanos*, p. 119 (n. 154) and for Ficino's relation to Origen in general, see E. Wind, 'The Revival of Origen', in *Studies in Art and Literature for Belle da Costa Greene*, ed. by Dorothy Miner, Princeton, 1954, pp. 412–24, repr. with additions in Wind's *Eloquence of Symbols: Studies in Humanist Art*, ed. by J. Anderson, Oxford, 1983, pp. 42–55.

basic aspects. He speaks of *ascensus* when he wants to show that the way of the soul leads up through the various degrees of the hierarchy of being. The soul ascends from the material sphere into the intelligible and from there to God himself. The idea of *ascensus* underlines the cosmic dimension of the Redemption. The term *raptus*, by analogy with the tradition of the *raptus Pauli* (2 Cor. 12:2–4), has a paradigmatic significance for Ficino. In addition to the Neoplatonic model of the *ascensus*, Ficino falls back on the specific Christian tradition that the soul cannot manage the ascent through its own powers but is dependent on divine influence. In *De raptu Pauli* he writes: 'Incolae terrae caelestes non scandunt gradus nisi caelestis Pater traxerit illos.'⁴¹ Finally, regarding the quality of the soul, Ficino characterizes the ascent as *purgatio* and as *deificatio*. The concepts complement each other. Purification means the progressive detachment of the soul from the sensible and material sphere, whereas deification means the corresponding process of increasing penetration and transformation of the soul through the intelligibility and the Spirit of God. These concepts underpin the fundamentals of Ficino's theory: the gradual ascent through the cosmic order of being, the penetrating divine influence, the step-by-step abstraction from the sensible sphere, and ultimately the return to the divine origin of the soul.

Ficino analyses in detail the process of the ascent using the constitutive activities of the soul, the intellect and the will. In both cases it is characteristic of his explanation that he intends to harmonize the idea of the activity of the soul with the causative influence of God. For Ficino, thinking—the activity of the human intellect—is the path via which the soul can reach God. The cognition of God is nothing else than the formation of the human intellect by the divine intellect caused through the mediation of the divine ray. Using its intellectual power, the soul ascends from sensible perception to the contemplation of the Ideas. In this process it returns the intelligible structure of reality to its divine origin. Based on the Platonic doctrine of Ideas, the cognition of the world leads automatically to the cognition of God. Ficino notes in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: 'Nam aut Deus in rebus agnoscitur aut cognoscuntur res in Deo aut Deus in seipso cognoscitur.'⁴² For Ficino this intellectual

⁴¹ *Epistolarum liber II, Opera omnia*, p. 697 (also printed in Marcel's edition of the *Theologia Platonica*, III, p. 347).

⁴² *Opera omnia*, p. 437.

ascent is based on the principle, 'neque Deus sine Deo cognoscitur':⁴³ human intellect must be formed in the act of cognition through the divine intellect. The thinking of divine ideas necessarily transforms the soul because God works as the moving and the forming power: 'in animo contemplante Deus et primus motor est, et formator ultimus, ideo totus actus est Deus, quo quidem actu et ipse semper est Deus, et animus fit saltem quandoque divinus'.⁴⁴ So the cognition of God is a kind of deification. This doctrine is perhaps one of Ficino's most productive combinations of Platonic and Christian theories. He identifies the mediation of the divine ray with the effect of divine grace.⁴⁵ It is an impressive example of how Ficino combines the Platonic theory of cognition with the Christian doctrine of grace and synthesizes both into a theory of the divine formation of the intellectual power.

According to Christian tradition the theological virtues, faith, hope and love constitute the main factors in redemption besides the intellectual cognition of God. In his theological writings, Ficino deals with that famous triad. He characterizes faith, hope and love as the three *gratiae* which guarantee divine presence in the soul.⁴⁶ They therefore bring the soul into contact with God. They are—as he remarks in a sermon—like three nerves which connect the soul with Christ and with the divine sphere of the cosmos.⁴⁷ By integrating these three virtues with the cosmic order of the three heavens Ficino gives this theory a special character: 'Atque ita ex fide per ipsam spem ad caritatem quasi tertium coelum ascendemus.'⁴⁸ According to the cosmic order the process of redemption begins on the first level with faith, proceeds with hope on the second level and finally reaches perfection on the third level with love.

This specific hierarchy becomes more evident when we look at the way in which Ficino defines the theological virtues in detail. Faith is the beginning of the ascent of the soul to God. It means a kind of consciousness of the original relation to God. Sometimes

⁴³ *Theologia Platonica*, XIV.8 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 275).

⁴⁴ *Theologia Platonica*, XII.4 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 172).

⁴⁵ *Epistolarum liber II*, *Opera omnia*, p. 702 (and in Marcel's edition of the *Theologia Platonica*, III, p. 357): 'Radius Dei bonae menti benignus advenit paterque et gratia nominatur.'

⁴⁶ 'Tria haec ipsius praesentiae Dei certissima sunt argumenta', *Opera omnia*, p. 443.

⁴⁷ *Opera omnia*, p. 481.

⁴⁸ *Opera omnia*, p. 475.

Ficino characterizes faith with the terms *affectus in Deum*⁴⁹ and *intentio*. So faith for Ficino is the reception and perception of the divine. It is the first level on which the divine represents itself in the soul: the soul is affected and touched through God and moved towards God. Thus faith is a kind of organ which allows the soul to perceive the divine. Particularly in the commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Ficino argues against the scholastic understanding of faith, which is, of course, quite different from his theory of perception. His attitude in this case is quite remarkable. As with the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, he takes over scholastic phrases, but this time he attempts to give his own interpretation. As an example it may be sufficient to mention Ficino's use of the classic expression 'fides caritate formata'. The scholastic definition means for Ficino the inner orientation of faith towards love: the phrase describes the development of the ascent from faith to love. Ficino does not share the contrary doctrine of Thomas, that faith must be formed by love. He uses the same scholastic terminology but he means something different.

His interpretation of 'fides caritate formata' leads to the next step, hope. His notes on this theme are scant, but he plainly wants to keep the systematic order of the three virtues, and accordingly emphasizes that hope is exactly between faith and love. Hope is stronger than faith and therefore guarantees a stronger relation to God. Hope not merely connects the soul with God, it overcomes the resistance of the material sphere because it can perceive the love of God towards the world.⁵⁰

Ficino repeatedly emphasizes that redemption without love is impossible. If we recall that he became famous precisely as a philosopher of love, this is scarcely surprising; but it is nevertheless of interest to see how he deals with the phenomenon of love in the special context of his theory of redemption. He wants to show that love is an activity of the soul caused by God. Therefore he develops a complete metaphysical theory of love. God as the highest goodness loves Himself because in this act of love the divine will is directed to the highest and most perfect object, the *summum bonum*. It is characteristic of this highest and most perfect form of love that it communicates

⁴⁹ *Opera omnia*, p. 462.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Theologia Platonica*, XIV.8 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 278).

and diffuses itself: 'Proprium boni est quod se diffundit'.⁵¹ This is the starting point of the circle that performs the act of divine love. In the act of creation it proceeds from itself, then through the love of creatures, love returns to its divine origin. In this circle divine love influences the human soul in that it develops in the soul an inclination towards love itself. This response, which is caused by divine love, manifests itself in the soul as the love of God and as an activity of the soul. So human love is directed to the *sumum bonum* as the final destination of the soul; at the same time the ascent of human love is the return of divine love to itself.⁵²

Ficino gives an impressive illustration of this circle by the phenomenon of beauty. God Himself is—as Ficino underlines with explicit reference to Plato—the cause, the foundation and the origin of all beauty.⁵³ Beauty is splendour and the ray of divine goodness. Following the tendency of goodness, divine beauty also tends to diffuse and broadcast itself through the cosmos. Ficino sees the granting of beauty as the infusion of grace: 'Ut pulchrum [*sc.* deus] illuminat gratiamque infundit'.⁵⁴ In this process beauty affects the soul and causes human love as desire for the transcendent prototype of beauty. So love is a *desiderium pulchritudinis* which God gave his creatures. This desire is lit by the sensible perception of beauty but it leads the soul beyond that to the divine origin of beauty. Here too we can observe the circular structure. Divine beauty proceeds, presents itself to creatures and returns as a kindled love to itself. Human love is the reaction of the soul to the provocation of beauty and therefore has its origin and aim in God.⁵⁵ This love caused by God transforms the soul via a kind of embellishing, and by a gradual movement towards perfection it is assimilated to its divine goal.

⁵¹ *Theologia Platonica*, XII.3 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 162), cf. 'bonitatis proprium est diffundere et communicare seipsam', *Opera omnia*, p. 21.

⁵² Unfortunately neither Dress nor Nygren took into consideration that human love for Ficino is caused by divine love. Consequently they interpreted his understanding of love as the self-elevation of the Soul; see Dress, *Die Mystik Marsilio Ficinos*, p. 193, and A. Nygren, *Eros und Agape*, Gütersloh, 1930, pp. 502–03. Charles Trinkaus properly contested this opinion in *In Our Image and Likeness*, pp. 751–52.

⁵³ 'Hoc mysterium in epistola ad Dionysium regem Plato significavit, cum Deum affirmavit pulchrorum omnium causam, quasi totius pulchritudinis principium et originem', *Opera omnia*, p. 1325; cf. Plato, *Ep.* 2, 312E.

⁵⁴ *Opera omnia*, p. 1324.

⁵⁵ Cf. M. J. B. Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of his 'Phaedrus' Commentary, its Sources and Genesis*, Berkeley etc., 1984, pp. 185–203; W. Beierwaltes, *Marsilio Ficinos Theorie des Schönen im Kontext des Platonismus*, Heidelberg, 1980, p. 33.

We have seen that for Ficino the ascent of the soul happens through the intellect by thinking and through the will by faith, hope and, above all, love. This description is based on the difference between *intellectus* and *voluntas* as the two powers of the human mind. Following Plato, Ficino speaks of the two wings which elevate the soul to God.⁵⁶ For Ficino, however, it is not possible to separate strictly the cognition of God from the love for God in such a way that they would be alternate ways of reaching God. In the soul's ascent both are related to each other, although it must be admitted that Ficino does not always seem to have a coherent answer to this standard question. His attempts to explain the problem in other works show that he understood the co-operation of cognition and love as a reciprocal interaction.⁵⁷ For that purpose he gives a notable characterization of the activities of intellect and will: 'Proinde cognoscendo Deum eius amplitudinem contrahimus ad mentis nostrae capacitatem atque conceptum, amando vero mentem amplificamus ad latitudinem divinae bonitatis immensam.'⁵⁸ In the act of cognition the soul draws the divine into itself, but through love it extends itself to the infinity of God. Both actions together constitute the union of the soul with God and the thinking of the intellect signifies the presence of God in the soul, whereas the love of the will represents the presence of the soul in God. There is a notion of the soul being in itself and outside itself at the same time. In Ficino's interpretation of mental powers and activities, then, we can see that he thinks of the transformation and deification of the soul as a process in which its identity is preserved even as it extends into the immense infinity of God.

From a theological point of view it is important to emphasize that for Ficino the whole process of redemption is related to the permanent influence of God, since man cannot ascend to God by his

⁵⁶ 'Concludamus animam nostram per intellectum et voluntatem tanquam geminas illas platonicas alas idcirco volare ad Deum', *Theologia Platonica*, XIV.3 (ed. Marcel, III, p. 259); cf. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 249c-d.

⁵⁷ See Ficino's letter to John Colet in S. Jayne, *John Colet and Marsilio Ficino*, Oxford, 1963, pp. 82-83. The problematic relation between intellect and will is widely discussed in the literature; see generally Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 270-76; idem, 'A Thomist Critique of Marsilio Ficino's Theory of Will and Intellect', in *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume*, English Section, 2, Jerusalem, 1965, pp. 463-94, at pp. 473-76; and M. J. B. Allen, *Marsilio Ficino: The 'Philebus' Commentary*, Berkeley, 1975, pp. 40-45, who rightly points out the 'fundamental circularity' of Ficino's doctrine (p. 43). See also Albertini's essay in this volume.

⁵⁸ *Opera omnia*, p. 664; see also *Theologia Platonica*, XIV.10 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 292).

own unaided powers. The actions of the intellect as well as of love are caused by the divine ray and have therefore an inner orientation towards God. Though he does not make the connection explicit, it is clear that Ficino's doctrine of the divine ray is a special form of a theory of grace. Grace is for him the force deriving from divine emanation which transforms the human soul. The soul's ascent is indissolubly related to this divine effect. In the commentary on St Paul, Ficino even speaks of the importance of grace alone, *sola gratia*, in the process of redemption.⁵⁹ Yet Ficino's understanding of human freedom shows that the causality of grace cannot be interpreted as an irresistible compulsion. Even with the effect of grace, the independence of the soul remains intact. So the ascent of the soul caused and moved by God is nevertheless an action of that soul.

5. *Ficino's Eschatology*

Following Christian tradition Ficino presumes an eschatological perfection of human life in the beyond. He is much taken up with eschatological questions in the last book of the *Theologia Platonica*, following the proofs of the immortality of the soul. This may be the reason why his theory of last things is strictly orientated towards the individual. He concentrates his argument on the themes of death, the Final Judgement, Hell and Resurrection. From a theological point of view this is rather peculiar. Ficino does not mention at all such classic *topoi* of Christian thought as the Kingdom of God. Nor does he deal with the perfection of creation, although we might have expected such a discussion when he came to deal with cosmology. Apart from this highly individual focus, Ficino differentiates between philosophical and theological arguments and it is notable that he gives precedence to Christian tradition—and does so at the very climax of his major philosophical work.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ficino uses the term *sola gratia* repeatedly in the commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: see *Opera omnia*, pp. 429, 453, 457, 459, 463 and 471; see also Dress, *Die Mystik des Marsilio Ficino*, p. 199 and M. Heitzmann, 'La libertà e il fato nella filosofia di Marsilio Ficino', *Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica*, 28 (1936), pp. 350–71, and 29 (1937), pp. 59–82, at p. 77.

⁶⁰ 'Sed ecce iam beata Evangelii sancti commemoratio nos admonere videtur, ut philosophicis dimissis ambagibus breviori tramite beatitudinem ea quaeramus via, qua Christiani ducunt theologij', *Theologia Platonica*, XVIII.8 (ed. Marcel, III, p. 208 f.).

In his interpretation of death Ficino largely follows Platonic tradition. Although he does not in general share its strong dualism of soul and body, he accepts the Platonic concept of *meditatio mortis*. Through contemplation man can expedite the separation of soul from body. This kind of meditation not only prepares man for his death but also liberates him step by step from the influence of the sensible sphere. Death is the perfection of this liberation: 'Totum hoc philosophiae studium, ut inquit Plato, est meditatio mortis, siquidem mors est animae a corpore liberatio.'⁶¹ With this Platonic argument Ficino tries to give death a positive significance, which is necessary for his proof of the immortality of the soul. In this context he also has to contend with the phenomena of agony and the fear of death, which seem to argue against immortality. Ficino gives an opposite interpretation of the problem: agony and the fear of death are actually proof that the soul has already in this life a presentiment of future life after death, otherwise those feelings and emotions would be pointless. This argument is based on an idea, which generally plays an important role in Ficino's eschatology, that we have in this life an anticipation of the next, something that reveals an inner relation between the two.

This inner relation means that death cannot be a radical breach between this and the other world. Ficino rather presumes that the inclination of the soul, which is acquired during this life, will be preserved in the next, in a changed form, however, as reward or as punishment. He interprets the idea of the Last Judgement in this sense but it is no simple matter to bring this concept into harmony with the Christian tradition. For Ficino this and the next life are in the same relationship as seed and harvest.⁶² This kind of correspondence makes external judgement superfluous. But at least in the commentary on the Epistle to the Romans Ficino attempts to harmonize his theory with Christian doctrine by making use of the concept of conscience. After death, after the separation from the body, the soul can better estimate its own attitude and its character. This act of the conscience is caused by the divine light and is in that

⁶¹ *Theologia Platonica*, XVI.8 (ed. Marcel, III, p. 143); cf. Plato, *Phaedo*, 64c.

⁶² Cf. *Theologia Platonica*, XVIII.10 (ed. Marcel, III, p. 227); see also R. Klein, 'L'enfer de Marsile Ficin', in *Umanesimo e esoterismo*, ed. by E. Castelli, Padua, 1960, pp. 47-84, at p. 47, and Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, p. 360.

respect an effect of God as judge.⁶³ So judgement takes place in the conscience. Reward and punishment are mental acts. Thus Ficino retains scarcely any element of the traditional interpretation of the Last Judgement as an external tribunal after death, as a particular judgement, and then at the end of the world, as a universal judgement. It is not surprising that in some passages of his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans he finally abandons the theory.⁶⁴

Ficino's tendency to spiritualize reward and punishment in the Last Judgement is also characteristic of his conception of Hell.⁶⁵ Ficino divides those in Hell into four groups, according to the soul's attitude in this life. For three of them there exists the possibility that through 'punishment'—and that means for Ficino through the influence of the divine ray—the sensual affection of the soul can be purified to various degrees. For those souls, however, in whom affinity to God is totally extinguished there is no chance of purification. Their reason is absolutely impaired—they retain merely enough to discern that they are separated from God forever and will have to suffer unending pains in the form of delusions. It is true that in other respects Ficino was milder and more generous. He opened the gate of Heaven for children who died before baptism and pagan philosophers.⁶⁶ But nevertheless he did not give up the doctrine of eternal damnation, although he knew that Pico had argued convincingly against the theory.⁶⁷

Another noteworthy feature of Ficino's eschatology is his theory of the resurrection of the body. Considering his dualistic interpreta-

⁶³ 'Iam vero conscientiae virtus causam pro anima, vel contra animam agitans coram intimo lumine, tanquam Iudice leges habente', *Opera omnia*, p. 451; cf. Allen, *Synoptic Art*, pp. 125–47, and Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, pp. 749–50.

⁶⁴ Cf. for example: 'Ex superioribus Pauli verbis intelligere licet, quandoquidem animae nunc se quodammodo iudicant atque damnant, multo magis in alia vita, ubi seipsas magis animadvertent, illas suo se iudicio damnaturas', *Opera omnia*, p. 451. It should be conceded that there are also a few other passages in which Ficino refers to the traditional conception of the Final Judgement. Evidently he had not developed his own theory fully or consistently.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Theologia Platonica*, XVIII.10 (ed. Marcel, III, p. 230); see also Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 360–67, and Allen's essay in this volume.

⁶⁶ 'L'anime de' philosophi innanzi l'avvenimento di Cristo potere essere salve', Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, I, p. 14; see also Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, p. 362, and G. Anichini, *L'umanesimo e il problema della salvezza in Marsilio Ficino*, p. 124.

⁶⁷ For his relation to Pico on this question, see Lauster, *Die Erlösungslehre Marsilio Ficanos*, pp. 215, n. 55, and 217, n. 65.

tion of death, it is odd that he shares the orthodox Christian doctrine. Moreover he tries to find philosophical arguments as to why the body must rise again, without, of course, meaning a resurrection of the earthly body. He assumes a divine re-creation will take place at the end of the world,⁶⁸ when God will create a *purissimum corpus*. A passage in a sermon shows that this new body has an eminently intelligible structure.⁶⁹ Only through this spiritualization of the body can human redemption be complete.

In Ficino's view the highest fulfilment lies in the *visio* and the *fruitio Dei*. This pair corresponds to the two powers of the soul. The final action of the soul is not something completely new and different—it is still the perfection and the highest degree of the experience of God which the soul can reach on a lower and anticipatory level in this life. In his concept of ascent, the soul finds the fulfilment of its desire and repose in God since the intellect and the will have reached their goal. So the soul acts with pleasure and joy. The transformation of the soul becomes full deification. That does not mean, of course, that the soul becomes identical with God, but that the soul receives divine qualities: it can think and love with a divine perspective and in a divine way. In the vision of God the circle of the divine ray is completed. The soul receives the powers to think and love God in itself and itself in God. So the soul loves its own idea in God and God loves in the soul an idea of itself. The intellect sees God 'face to face', it recognizes God, but in doing so the intellect sees that it cannot recognize God in His whole infinity. In this paradox Ficino follows the stream of Neoplatonic-tinged apophatic theology. Even in the *visio et fruitio Dei* there remains the ontological difference between God and the soul. The *visio beatifica* is not a mystical union. Indeed, Ficino emphasizes the substantial character of the union between soul and God, but he does not understand this union to mean that unification involves a self-losing of the soul in God or the loss of independence. Even in the perfection of redemption, the soul retains its identity.

⁶⁸ Cf. 'recreatio illa per Deum facta, cessante mundi motu', *Theologia Platonica*, XVIII.9 (ed. Marcel, III, p. 224).

⁶⁹ Cf. *Opera omnia*, p. 481.

6. *Conclusion*

This discussion of Ficino's theological views has sought to show how he attempted to realize his programme of Christian Platonism. Dealing with particular issues in the Christian tradition, he used his philosophical tenets (that is, his own transformation of Platonic and Neoplatonic cosmology) to explain and interpret Christian doctrines. Naturally, he did not invent the method. Since earliest times, the Christian Church had used philosophical arguments to explain and defend her doctrines. In the context of the Christian reception of Platonism, however, Marsilio Ficino is undoubtedly an impressive figure. For him Platonism was not pure speculation: he wanted to make Christian doctrines plausible and reasonable with Platonic arguments.⁷⁰ In various places in his work, especially in the great prefaces, Ficino identified his programme as being an apology for Christianity through Platonic philosophy. Platonism added a novel aspect to a number of traditional theological doctrines: his view of the soul with its two tendencies as well as his understanding of the Trinity and Incarnation; his theory of redemption as the ascent to God; and his doctrine of grace as the descending and returning circle of the divine light.

On the other hand we have to recognize that Ficino could not integrate into his system every aspect of Christian doctrine. He defines God's salvific action as a transformation of the soul. This idea means that he cannot integrate a part of the Christian tradition. Obviously his concentration on the experience of the soul gave his theology a very individual character. He hardly deals with the Sacraments, for example, and not at all with theories concerning the Church. From the point of view of dogmatics, one has to note a striking lack of ecclesiological issues in Ficino. Even odder is his relation to theological authorities. There are some doctrines for which Ficino was not able to find a plausible philosophical or Platonic explanation, for example the theory of the Atonement and the Cross of Christ as mankind's salvation. In these cases Ficino took a strange course: his interest in maintaining a correct and orthodox theology was so strong that he preferred to quote Thomas Aquinas. It cannot be an accident that he depends on Thomas most of all when he found

⁷⁰ See especially Allen, *Synoptic Art*, ch. 2.

insuperable difficulties for his Platonic-Christian philosophizing. This is, of course, a completely different solution from that adopted by the Enlightenment two hundred years and more later, which tried rather to rebut the dogmas themselves.

Occasional inconsistencies mar Ficino's theological arguments, but this should not lead us to underestimate his importance as a Christian thinker. As we have seen, his theological theories set out to harmonize the sublimity of man with the Christian doctrine that God acts through His grace for the salvation of man. Ficino tried to give a Christian foundation to his age's new self-confidence in man, and in this lies his importance for the story of Christian theology.

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LATE ANTIQUITY AND FLORENTINE PLATONISM: THE 'POST-PLOTINIAN' FICINO¹

Christopher S. Celenza

'Ex pagano Christi miles': 'From a pagan, a soldier of Christ'. Perhaps Ficino's early biographer Giovanni Corsi put things a bit too baldly when speaking of Ficino's ordination as a priest.² Ficino was in fact ordained on 18 December 1473—an important year in the history of Florence, a year which saw the reopening of the Florentine university and the fashioning of some of the most notable elements of the ascendancy of Lorenzo de' Medici.³ How could this Catholic priest reconcile his orthodoxy with some of the more recondite practices he came across in the post-Plotinian Platonic tradition? It would be a tidy story if we could accept Corsi's version of the tale: that Ficino in his early years went through a possibly 'pagan' period of self-doubt and then, having burned his early heterodox Lucretianizing works, became thoroughly orthodox with the passage of time.⁴ But

¹ For helpful comments I would like to thank Michael J. B. Allen and Salvatore Camporeale.

² Corsi's biography of Ficino is edited in R. Marcel, *Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499)*, Paris, 1958, pp. 679-89; see p. 683: 'Sed quum jam annos aetatis suae duos ac quadraginta exegisset, ex pagano Christi miles factus, ex duobusque sacerdotiis, quorum curam per Laurentium Medicem susceperat, proventus annuos satis honestos capiens, patrimonium omne fratribus reliquit.' An English translation of the biography is available in *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, 6 vols to date, London, 1975-, III, pp. 135-48. See also Marcel, *Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 403-20.

³ For Ficino's ordination, see Marcel, *Marsilio Ficino*, p. 404, n. 1; for the environment, see R. Fubini, 'Ficino e i Medici all'avvento di Lorenzo il Magnifico', *Rinascimento*, 2a ser., 24 (1984), pp. 3-52; idem, 'Ancora su Ficino e i Medici', *Rinascimento*, 2a ser., 27 (1987), pp. 275-91; these two pieces are now in Fubini's *Quattrocento fiorentino: Politica, diplomazia, cultura*, Pisa, 1996, pp. 235-301; J. Hankins, 'Lorenzo de' Medici as a Patron of Philosophy', *Rinascimento*, 2a ser., 34 (1994), pp. 15-53; and A. F. Verde, *Lo studio fiorentino, 1473-1503: Ricerche e documenti*, 5 vols, Florence, 1973-94.

⁴ The exaggerations in this account were corrected by P. O. Kristeller, 'Per la biografia di Marsilio Ficino' (1938), in his *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, 4 vols, Rome, 1956-96, I, pp. 191-211; essential now on Ficino's spiritual crisis is J. Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Leiden etc., 1990, pp. 454-59.

that would be to misconceive certain fundamental questions concerning the nature of religion and philosophy, indeed concerning the nature of early modern European religiosity itself.

The first question is that of orthodoxy, which, to reverse the usual phrase, *fit, non nascitur*.⁵ Let us remind ourselves of a few fifteenth-century conditions. In the middle of the century a thinker, Lorenzo Valla, who in certain writings seemed to be advocating the development of a radically different, almost proto-Lutheran ecclesiology and who in other writings challenged the legitimacy of the Vulgate Bible, became an apostolic secretary during the pontificate of Calixtus III.⁶ The notion of the individual human soul's immortality was still seen as such a controversial issue that the Fifth Lateran Council saw fit to pronounce on it in the second decade of the sixteenth century.⁷ Protestantism as a sect, or series of sects, did not yet exist. While it would be incautious to overstate the case, it is not unreasonable to say that it is very difficult to come to a universally acceptable definition of early modern Catholic orthodoxy, especially before the Council of Trent. Even during the years of the Council in the sixteenth century, the concept of what was heretical changed from region to region in Italy, decade to decade. One has only to think of the Ferrara of the 1540s and of Renée de France, the Calvinist sympathizing wife of Ercole II d'Este; there, during the 1540s, Renée distanced herself more and more from Catholic ritual, openly supporting Protestants passing through Ferrara, despite her husband's opposition.⁸ James Hankins puts it well: 'The real contention in Renaissance Italy was not between paganism and Christianity but

⁵ See J. B. Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy*, Albany, NY, 1998, p. 39, and W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, Philadelphia, 1971.

⁶ See at least S. I. Camporeale, *Lorenzo Valla: Umanesimo e teologia*, Florence, 1972; the literature in *Lorenzo Valla e l'umanesimo italiano: Atti del convegno internazionale di studi umanistici (Parma, 18-19 ottobre 1984)*, ed. by O. Besomi and M. Regoliosi, Padua, 1986; and J. Monfasani, 'Was Lorenzo Valla an Ordinary Language Philosopher?', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 50 (1989), pp. 309-23. On Valla's biblical work see J. H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, Princeton, 1983, and C. S. Celenza, 'Renaissance Humanism and the New Testament: Lorenzo Valla's Annotations to the Vulgate', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 21 (1994), pp. 33-52.

⁷ For the most recent treatment of this problem, with full bibliographical references, see E. A. Constant, 'A Reinterpretation of the Fifth Lateran Council Decree *Apostolici regiminis*', forthcoming, in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*.

⁸ See F. Bacchelli, 'Science, Cosmology, and Religion in Ferrara, 1520-1550', in *Dosso's Fate: Painting and Court Culture in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by L. Ciammitti, S. F. Ostrow, and S. Settis, Los Angeles, 1998, pp. 333-54.

rather between competing definitions of what Christianity was and what it meant to be a Christian.⁹ In other words, one could be a sincere Christian, as I believe Ficino was, and still be a legitimate advocate of practices which in hindsight seem heterodox.

The second major question concerns Ficino's self-presentation. Historians have to be very careful when taking a thinker at his word. On the one hand, if one reads too many implications into a thinker, one can swiftly become ahistorical, and thus lose the evidentiary basis on which good scholarship depends. On the other hand, taking a thinker only at his word risks naiveté, especially when enough evidentiary links exist to supplement what a thinker claims superficially to be doing. Ficino, for example, often stresses how important, indeed central, Plato is in his vision of the *prisca theologia*; but many scholars, too numerous to list, have shown that Ficino's adherence to Plato is far from modern.

In the case of Plotinus the same sort of situation obtains. While scholars have shown Ficino's divergences from Plotinus on a number of specific points, my focus here is different: I seek to show the manner in which Ficino's overall view of the relation of philosophy and religion is more similar to post-Plotinian—or even non-Plotinian—Platonism than to Plotinian Platonism. In order to do this, I shall offer a somewhat detailed examination of Plotinus's views on matter and on the individual soul, and the manner in which the later Platonic tradition reacted to and absorbed these positions. Thereafter I move to Ficino. The general thesis I shall advance is that, in the course of later Platonism, Plotinus's views in the two areas mentioned were seen as highly intellectualized and even arrogant. The result was that post-Plotinian Platonists sought to remedy the flaws in the system by embracing a different view of the status of matter and of the structure of the individual soul. This had profound implications for the manner in which philosophers regarded the place of ritual within the philosophical life and the status of philosophy itself. Ficino's views mirror aspects of this development, for two reasons. First, the post-Plotinian developments to be addressed accorded better with certain Christian conceptions dear to Ficino, despite the fact that the Platonic innovators themselves, especially Iamblichus, were

⁹ Hankins, *Plato*, I, p. 205.

decidedly non-Christian.¹⁰ Second, one must take into account what I shall call 'cultural compression'. Especially since we are investigating here the influence of late antiquity, we must be cognizant of the tremendous span of time in antiquity which the texts that Renaissance thinkers had access to represented.¹¹ We must be sure not to regard antiquity as monolithic. Two centuries separate Plotinus from Proclus. Eight separate Plato from Augustine. Though it might seem simplistic, we must remind ourselves how variegated were the historical circumstances under which the ancient texts whose reception we study were produced. The implications of asking these sorts of questions of ancient texts are manifold if we consider them together with the reception of those texts by Renaissance thinkers: hence cultural compression. If we treat a Renaissance thinker developmentally and not statically, we must acknowledge the possibility that the thinker under consideration will reflect themes and tendencies in his own work that themselves reveal developments of mentality which in antiquity took centuries to be realized. To understand a Renaissance thinker fully, the ancient context, as well as the ancient text, should be studied in detail.

Plotinus

It is believed, based on a report in the biography by his student Porphyry, that Plotinus did not begin writing until rather late in life, and that when he did his views were more or less fully formed, having been based on a life of teaching and thinking.¹² After his death

¹⁰ In this sense this study will also reflect a growing realization among scholars of late antiquity that the paradigm 'paganism versus emerging (triumphant) Christianity' is not the most valuable one, and that it is profitable to seek instead the similarities of mentality which cut across 'confessional' lines. See e.g. G. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1990; among the numerous studies of P. Brown, see *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine*, New York, 1972, and *The Making of Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1978; G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Ancient Pagan Mind*, Cambridge, 1986; reissued with new preface, Princeton, 1993; R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, Harmondsworth, 1986; R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, New Haven, Conn., 1981.

¹¹ See B. P. Copenhaver, 'Iamblichus, Synesius, and the *Chaldaean Oracles* in Marsilio Ficino's *De Vita Libri Tres: Hermetic Magic or Neoplatonic Magic?*', in *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. by J. Hankins, J. Monfasani, and F. Purnell, Jr., Binghamton, NY, 1987, pp. 441-55, at pp. 454-55.

¹² I use the texts and translations of Plotinus of A. H. Armstrong in the Loeb

Porphyry edited and organized Plotinus's writings into six sets of nine treatises, the *Enneads*, through which we know his thought. Essential to his philosophical system is his 'emanationistic' ontology, a system of hypostases which has at the top a transcendent One, beyond Being, and about which it is difficult if not impossible to assert anything.¹³ In fact, one of the few ways we can get to know the One is by telling what it is not.¹⁴ The One, beyond Being and a transmogrified version of Plato's form of the Good, overflows to the next ontological level, that of Nous, or Intellect, which contains Plato's forms. Nous itself overflows into the next hypostasis, Psyche, or Soul, which then eventually produces the final and lowest level, Hyle, Matter.¹⁵

Matter is problematic, for Plotinus conceives of it as evil and in a way as the root of evil in the world. For Plotinus its hypostatic status was always uncertain; it is literally anti-substantial. Though matter does form part of the overall ontological scheme, which is necessarily good, from a specific standpoint matter is as far from good as can be, partaking in fact of the form of non-being.¹⁶ This raises the question whether the presence of evil is possible in Soul, which produced matter, and is in general reflective of the larger problem in the history of western philosophy of reconciling the presence of mundane evil with an omnipotent, presumably good, superior universal force. The status of matter as evil, however, was a

series; vol. 1, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1966, includes a text and translation of Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*; for Plotinus's not writing until his fifty-ninth year, see the *Life*, 3-5. It should be noted, however, that at least one recent scholar has seen a development in Plotinus's anthropology, over against the static model; see J. Igal, 'Aristoteles y la evolución de la antropología de Plotino', *Pensamiento*, 35 (1979), pp. 315-46. See also the survey of K. Corrigan and P. O'Cleirigh, 'Plotinian Scholarship from 1971 to 1986', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II.36.1, ed. by W. Haase, Berlin and New York, 1987, pp. 571-623, at pp. 582-83.

¹³ Although one should note that Plotinus does not often use the Greek word for 'emanation', i.e., ἀποπέω, or its cognates. See H. Dörrie, 'Emanation: ein unphilosophisches Wort im spätantiken Denken', in his *Platonica minora*, Munich, 1976, pp. 70-85; this is noted also in H. J. Blumenthal's excellent historiographical survey, 'Plotinus in the Light of Twenty Years' Scholarship, 1951-1971', *Aufstieg und Niedergang*, II.36.1, pp. 528-70, at p. 547, n. 65.

¹⁴ Thus Augustine and many others have seen overlaps between Plotinus's thought and Pauline negative theology, an approach to which Ps.-Dionysius would give great emphasis.

¹⁵ See Blumenthal, 'Plotinus in the Light', pp. 547-49.

¹⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.8.10; see D. O'Brien, 'Plotinus on Matter and Evil', in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. by L. P. Gerson, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 171-95, at pp. 176-77.

problem with more immediate late ancient resonances, which were connected to the problem of our status in the cosmos and to the soteriological issue of the manner in which the individual soul could achieve salvation.

For Plotinus we are 'enmattered' beings, composed of an immortal soul and of matter.¹⁷ Yet matter is evil—the ultimate evil, privation¹⁸—and our soul must thus find a way to liberate itself from matter and attain union with the One (i.e., engage in *henosis*). As it was for all Platonists, for Plotinus thought and intellectual discipline were important. But Plotinus introduced an element into the problem of ascent which was self-consciously innovative, so much so that it would come to be rejected by most of his successors in the Platonic tradition. This was the notion that the individual human soul had not descended entire from the immaterial world.¹⁹ Rather, a part of each human being's individual soul had remained in the supra-material realm, at the hypostatic level of Nous, or perhaps Soul. As Plotinus wrote (*Enneads*, IV.8.8):

And, if one ought to dare to express one's own view more clearly, contradicting the opinion of others, even our soul does not altogether come down, but there is always something of it in the intelligible; but if the part which is in the world of sense-perception gets control, or rather if it is itself brought under control, and thrown into confusion [by the body], it prevents us from perceiving the things which the upper part of the soul contemplates.

Because of this it was possible for individual humans to ascend the ontological hierarchy basically under their own powers, provided they mustered enough intellectual rigor and discipline for the task.²⁰

Reaching the One means, in other words, completing oneself,

¹⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.7.1; see S. R. L. Clark, 'Plotinus: Body and Soul', in *Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, pp. 275–91, at p. 277.

¹⁸ O'Brien, 'Plotinus on Matter and Evil', pp. 178–81; as O'Brien explains (p. 180), this is why the body of the sensible and, inevitably, hylomorphic world 'remains forever a mere "corpse adorned"' (*Enn.*, II.4.5.18). In other words, matter, even when informed, retains its ontological status as anti-substantial, evil privation.

¹⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.8.8; see Blumenthal, 'Plotinus in the Light', p. 560; idem, *Plotinus' Psychology: His Doctrines of the Embodied Soul*, The Hague, 1971; and C. G. Steel, *The Changing Self. A Study on the Soul in Later Neoplatonism: Iamblichus, Damascius, and Priscianus*, Brussels, 1978, esp. pp. 34–38.

²⁰ Though of course the entire system itself is owed to the divine and thus in its entirety good; as Blumenthal puts the problem of the soul's being in matter, 'it is better for the soul not to be here, but all levels of existence must be, and in that sense its presence here is good'. See Blumenthal, *Plotinus' Psychology*, p. 5.

and it is something that can be done by cultivating the virtue present in one's own individual soul. It is our responsibility to do so, and in fact we possess a natural appetite toward the Good, which Plotinus distinguishes from a common affection.²¹ When the soul does not voluntarily conform to this appetite and is instead

flying from the All and standing apart in distinctness, and does not look toward the intelligible, it has become a part and is isolated and weak and fusses and looks towards a part and in its separation from the whole it embarks on one single thing and flies from everything else.

'We must fly from here and separate ourselves from what has been added to us.'²² The process of individual ascent is a choice which we, in our own sphere, are at liberty to make.²³ The philosopher's ascent does not depend, in other words, on any special ritual or any specifically corporeal acts, and certainly owes nothing whatsoever to the material world. Plotinus granted magic a positive existential status and perhaps even engaged in it, but did not consider magic something that could ever help the true philosopher ascend ontologically.²⁴

After Plotinus

Plotinus died in 270, having taught for most of his career at Rome. His thought spread in the Mediterranean world and the reactions to it were reflections of many of late antiquity's larger tensions. His student, editor and biographer Porphyry was in many ways a faithful disciple, especially when it came to the connected issues of the nature of the hypostases and the place of theurgic ritual in the life of the philosopher. Porphyry explained the hypostases as being in a

²¹ *Enneads*, I.1.5.26–27: 'Ἡ δὲ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ὄρεξις μὴ κοινὸν πάθημα.

²² *Enneads*, IV.8.4 and II.3.9; Clark, 'Plotinus: Body and Soul', pp. 279, 287.

²³ On the problem of individual liberty in an emanationistic context, G. Leroux puts it well in his 'Human Freedom in the Thought of Plotinus', *Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, p. 295: 'As Plotinus teaches in several treatises (notably IV.3 and IV.9), the universe possesses a single soul; while we must conceive of individual liberty, this can only be if we separate this liberty from the global destiny of the living world.' The soul's descent into matter is voluntary but conditioned by necessity whereas the return, the *epistrophe*, which the human subject initiates, is voluntary in the more familiar modern sense, involving 'the sense of choosing or of making an effort' (*ibid.*, p. 299).

²⁴ See Blumenthal, 'Plotinus in the Light', p. 561.

sense telescoped.²⁵ Rather than clearly delineated hypostatic ontological levels, there was some overlap among them. Thus he remained faithful to the spirit of Plotinus's view of the hypostases, which was decidedly not a rigid or overly hierarchized one.²⁶ This view of the hypostases served to highlight the status of the human soul, which, as we have seen, Plotinus believed was capable on its own of reaching the One, and which in a certain way was not as far away from the One as might be thought. With respect to theurgic ritual, although Porphyry often seems to vacillate (and was accused of this by Augustine), his basic position is that theurgy has a limited efficacy. Theurgy can affect the lower soul and is something to be used by non-philosophers, those without the ability or philosophical discipline to ascend on their own.²⁷ Theurgy was for those, Plotinus might have said, whose souls had flown from the All and become weak, standing apart in distinctness.

It was an awareness of this distinctness that would manifest itself in the generations after Plotinus and Porphyry. Late ancient thinkers, both Christian and pagan, were in the throes of creating new religious paradigms and were attempting to satisfy the religious needs which were being manifested in the Mediterranean world. In the late third and early fourth centuries, Christianity was one among hundreds of religions.²⁸ Despite the fact that its early architects were utilizing many Platonic themes in constructing Christian ideology—

²⁵ See W. Deuse, 'Der Demiurg bei Porphyrios und Iamblich', in *Die Philosophie des Neuplatonismus*, ed. by C. Zintzen, Darmstadt, 1977, pp. 238–78, at p. 251; A. C. Lloyd, 'The Later Neoplatonists', in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by A. H. Armstrong, Cambridge, 1970, pp. 272–325, at pp. 288–93; see also the cautions of A. Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition. A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism*, The Hague, 1974, p. 5 ff., and idem, 'Porphyrian Studies since 1913', *Aufstieg und Niedergang*, II.36.2, ed. by W. Haase, Berlin and New York, 1987, pp. 717–73, at p. 738.

²⁶ Blumenthal, for example, has commented on the overlap between Soul and Nous; see Blumenthal, *Plotinus' Psychology*.

²⁷ Positions expressed in his *De regressu animae*, ed. by J. Bidez in his *Vie de Porphyre, le philosophe néo-platonicien*, Ghent, 1913, pp. 25–44 and, more forcefully, in the *Epistola ad Anebonem*, ed. by A. Sodano, Naples, 1958. For Augustine, see *De civitate Dei*, IX.9: 'Nam et Porphyrius quondam quasi purgationem animae per theurgian, cunctanter tamen et pudibunda quodam modo disputatione promittit...'. Augustine goes on to recognize, however, Porphyry's belief that theurgy cannot in itself provide a means of ascent: 'reversionem vero ad Deum hanc artem praestare cuiquam negat'. Immediately thereafter the real criticism begins: 'ut videas cum inter vitium sacrilegae curiositatis et philosophiae professionem sententiis alternantibus fluctuare'.

²⁸ See MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, p. xii and passim.

among them the immortality of the soul, themes of return, and a radical spirit/matter distinction—there were certain things which Christianity possessed that were lacking in Platonic paganism. Especially important among these factors were a well-defined soteriology and efficacious rituals that aimed at uniformity. How did post-Plotinian Platonists address these gaps?

The central figure here is the Syrian philosopher Iamblichus, who studied with, then polemicized against, Porphyry.²⁹ For Platonists metaphysics is often a key to other aspects of their philosophy, and Iamblichus is no exception. His vision of the ontological hypostases gives us a clue to this. For his vision, in contrast to the ‘telescoped’ view offered by Porphyry, is much more ‘stepped’, so to speak. The hypostases are more discretely separated one from the other and their ontological boundaries more clearly drawn.³⁰ Consonant with this sort of ontological separation, the human soul is once again viewed as having descended entire from the realm of the divine, a position which, for Iamblichus, reflected the humility appropriate to the human condition. In a text of Proclus that preserves an opinion of Iamblichus, we read:

... we dare to react against those Platonists who contend that our soul is of the same weight as the gods and has the same essence as the divine souls and who say that it becomes the Intellect itself and the Intelligible and the One itself when it has abandoned everything and has been united with it... Such a pretension is, however, far removed from the teaching of Plato.³¹

Along these same lines Iamblichus articulates the problem of matter differently. Like all Platonists he concedes that the primary human objective is to free the spirit from matter; but he is much less pessimistic than Plotinus concerning the created world.³² The divine, he

²⁹ On Iamblichus in general, see J. Dillon, ‘Iamblichus of Chalcis (ca. AD 240–325)’, in *Aufstieg und Niedergang*, II.36.2, pp. 862–909; the studies collected in *The Divine Iamblichus: Philosopher and Man of Gods*, ed. by H. J. Blumenthal and E. G. Clark, London, 1993; and H. D. Saffrey, *Recherches sur le néoplatonisme après Plotin*, Paris, 1990, pp. 33–123.

³⁰ See Lloyd, ‘The Later Neoplatonists’, pp. 297–301.

³¹ Proclus, in *Timaeum*, III.231, 5–10, cited and translated in Steel, *The Changing Self*, p. 28.

³² See G. Shaw, ‘Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus’, *Traditio*, 41 (1985), pp. 1–28. Much of what remains in this paragraph depends on Shaw’s fundamental study. Crucial for the study of theurgy is H. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*, rev. edn, Paris, 1978.

thought, gave us certain things to aid us all, philosophers and non-philosophers alike, and the art of theurgy allowed us to use them efficaciously. The Greek word itself, *θεουργία*, is rich with implications.³³ Etymologically speaking, its two roots, *theos* and *ergon*, have to do with divinity and with work. The word can thus mean something like 'doing divine work', or even 'working the divine', with the implication that human beings are given a certain level of agency in operating on the world around them, to such an extent that they can in a limited respect even harness divinity for their own ends.³⁴

In practice theurgy took the form of the efficacious performance of 'ineffable acts beyond all human understanding', i.e., rituals performed by the operator.³⁵ These rituals could be seen as acceptable means of liberating the soul from the matter in which it was imprisoned. The highest level was left for philosophers alone, but all, philosophers and non-philosophers alike, should use and benefit from the god-given material aids to ascent which are present all around us.³⁶ For Iamblichus theurgy is especially important, indeed necessary, in purifying the soul, and functions thus as a liberator from fate and a necessary step toward union with the divine.³⁷ The material means are efficacious in themselves, whatever the disposition of the performer. It has not gone unnoticed that this position bears similarities to the Augustinian notion of the sacrament functioning *ex opere operato*.³⁸

³³ See Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles*, pp. 461–66.

³⁴ In addition to Shaw, 'Theurgy', see Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, pp. 79–87, who draws attention to the Egyptian antecedents of this view, with reports in the tradition of operators even becoming angry with the gods in order to manipulate them; see also *ibid.*, p. 132: 'The philosopher, for Plotinus an autonomous agent in the pursuit of perfection, was made by Iamblichus into an operative dependent on the help of superhuman forces.'

³⁵ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, II.11.96 (ed. des Places, 1989): 'ἡ [τελεσιουργία] τῶν ἔργων τῶν ἀρρήτων καὶ ὑπὲρ πάσαν νόησιν.'

³⁶ See Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, pp. 60–61.

³⁷ Hence the importance to Iamblichus of the vehicle of the soul, the *ὄχημα-πνεῦμα*, which he believed, taking inspiration from Plato's *Timaeus*, was crafted out of ether by the Demiurge. See J. F. Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*, Chico, Calif., 1985; and Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles*, pp. 178–84.

³⁸ See J. Trouillard, 'Sacraments: La théurgie paienne', *Encyclopaedia universalis*, 20 vols, Paris, 1968–73, XIV, pp. 582–83; see also J. Bidez, 'Le philosophe Jamblique et son école', *Revue des études grecques*, 32 (1919), p. 35; R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, London, 1972, p. 105 ff.; and C. de Vogel, 'Plotinus' Image of Man: Its Relationship to Plato as well as to Later Neoplatonism', in *Images of Man in Ancient and Medieval Thought*, ed. by F. Bossier et al., Louvain, 1976, p. 167 ff., all cited by Shaw, 'Theurgy', p. 11 and n. 51. For Augustine's position see his *Traité anti-Donatistes*, 5

Another notable factor: in *De mysteriis*, where many of Iamblichus's ideas are articulated, the Syrian philosopher self-consciously views his thought on these problems as a necessary synthesis of elements which were 'Egyptian'—by which he means notions drawn from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, 'Chaldean'—by which he means notions drawn from the *Chaldean Oracles*, and 'philosophical', that is, Platonic ideas.³⁹ He believes he is restoring an ancient wisdom—thus he forms part of an impulse to hark back to and unveil an ancient unitary wisdom as old (at least as a formula) as Numenius, who had early on spoken of a *παλαιὰ σοφία*.⁴⁰ More importantly, we should note that Iamblichus expanded the canon of works suitable for consideration by a 'Platonic' thinker and included in the canon texts that dealt directly with ritual. So much, then, for the problem of ritual and its place in Platonic philosophy. What of soteriology?

Here too Iamblichus was an innovator, this time in his *De secta Pythagorica*, a work probably of ten books originally. Representative par excellence of Neopythagoreanism, the work offers a twofold appreciation of Pythagoras.⁴¹ First, Iamblichus presents Pythagoras in a soteriological manner, as a figure sent down from the train of Apollo to save men's souls. Second, Iamblichus offers a clear message about the importance of Pythagoreanism, setting out an account of Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism that would lead the soul from what was 'less' Pythagorean (connected with materiality) to what was 'more' Pythagorean (connected to the immaterial).⁴² Iamblichus thus strengthened the post-Platonic notion that the sciences which were concerned with immaterial reality were the most truly Pythagorean.⁴³

This 'Pythagoreanizing' of Platonism by Iamblichus was part of the late ancient concern to find a means to harmonize the highest philosophical approach with the spiritual needs that all, philosophers

vols, Paris, 1963–65, esp. II (1964), *De baptismo libri VIII*, ed. by G. Bavard at VI.4–5 (pp. 412–14). See also the magisterial study of K. Flasch, *Augustinus: Einführung in sein Denken*, 2nd edn, Stuttgart, 1994, pp. 160–63.

³⁹ See Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, I.1, and Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, pp. 116–53.

⁴⁰ See A.-J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, 4 vols, Paris, 1949–54, I, pp. 19–26.

⁴¹ See D. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Oxford, 1989, and C. S. Celenza, 'Pythagoras in the Renaissance: The Case of Marsilio Ficino', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 52 (1999), pp. 667–711.

⁴² Iamblichus, *Protrepticus*, ed. by H. Pistelli, Stuttgart, 1888, p. 118.10–13. Tr. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, p. 42.

⁴³ O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, pp. 44–52.

included, experienced. Iamblichus offered a new appreciation of the power and necessity of ritual in the philosophical life, and his soteriological view of Pythagoras showed the concern on the part of the divine for the human race. Iamblichus changed the nature of Platonism to such an extent that he was routinely (as opposed to exceptionally) referred to as θεῖος—divine—by later Platonists.⁴⁴ The late ancient epithet comparing him and Porphyry is revelatory and often repeated: ἔνθους ὁ Σύρος, πολυμοθῆς ὁ Φοίνιξ—‘the Syrian [Iamblichus] was inspired by the gods, the Phoenician [Porphyry] highly learned’.⁴⁵

It is not that Iamblichus was followed whole cloth by all later Platonists in these assumptions. Important, however, is the new view of the philosophical life that his approach signals.⁴⁶ On the one hand a slightly later thinker, St Augustine (354–430), would adopt many tenets of Platonic metaphysics into the already ritually rich Christianity. On the other hand, Platonists ‘ritualized’ Platonism. The fifth-century thinker Proclus, head of the Athenian school, acknowledged the power of religious ritual and engaged in it,⁴⁷ even as he intellectualized it and saw different levels in the activity of theurgy that corresponded to the ontological levels of the universe.⁴⁸ He saw the enterprise of philosophy itself in soteriological terms.⁴⁹ Again we see the importance of acknowledging the similarities in mentality between late ancient paganism and Christianity rather than highlighting only their differences or antagonisms.

So far we have seen that in later Platonism Plotinus was a seminal thinker, and that later Platonists rang important changes on his thought, even as they accepted Plotinus as an integral part of the unveiling of Platonic wisdom. Many of the tendencies in Ficino’s thought bear similarities to those outlined above in the evolution of post-Plotinian

⁴⁴ See G. Fowden, ‘The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 102 (1982), pp. 33–59, at 36.

⁴⁵ See Steel, *The Changing Self*, p. 12.

⁴⁶ On Iamblichus’s importance for later Platonism, in addition to O’Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, see Lloyd, ‘The Later Neoplatonists’, p. 302, and the studies collected in *De Jamblique à Proclus*, Fondation Hardt Entretiens 21, août 1974, ed. by H. Dörrie, Geneva, 1975.

⁴⁷ He engaged in customary acts of sun-worship thrice daily; see Marinus, *Vita Procli*, ed. by J. F. Boissonade, Leipzig, 1850, ch. 22; Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, p. 127.

⁴⁸ See L. Siorvanes, *Proclus: Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Science*, New Haven, Conn., and London, 1996, pp. 191–99.

⁴⁹ See O’Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, pp. 142–55.

Platonism, in a way reflective of cultural compression. However, a missing piece of the puzzle comes in considering the social worlds in which these positions, both late ancient and Renaissance, were evolved. So it is appropriate to make the transition to Ficino by emphasizing that, to obtain a legitimate overview of him as a person, we must consider his literary production as a whole, and indeed his style of life. In this respect Ficino is more similar to the model of the late ancient holy man, as outlined by Garth Fowden, than he is to a disinterested philosopher concerned only with system building.⁵⁰

In studying the late ancient 'pagan holy man' Fowden sought to redress a historiographical gap; because of the pervasiveness of 'triumphalist' accounts of Christianity, much more attention had been paid to early Christian religious figures than to non-Christians. He suggested

that a tendency to associate holiness with philosophical learning determined the essentially urban and privileged background of the pagan holy man, and also encouraged his gradual drift to the periphery of society. This process of marginalization, together with the exclusivist and even (apparently) misanthropic attitudes of many holy men, became crucial factors in the leadership-crisis of late paganism.⁵¹

There are a number of parallels in the world of Ficino, and, of course, a number of differences.

As to parallels, we may note Ficino's similar embrace of the notion that holiness and philosophical learning went hand in hand. He, too, was part of an urban culture, part, in fact, of one of the most advanced urban cultures in Europe; the fact that he was not a political activist in the traditional Florentine civic sense has long been known; he, too, for various reasons drifted from being at the center of Florentine intellectual life in the late 1460s and early 1470s to being just one of many artists and intellectuals under the broad wing of Medici patronage as the age of Lorenzo took shape.⁵² The salient difference is that in the earlier period, say the fourth century, Catholicism was one of many religions in the late empire, whereas in the fifteenth century the Church was western Europe's main religious entity. Even here, though, we should note that the fifteenth century was a time of greater crisis in religion than is often

⁵⁰ In addition to Fowden, 'Pagan Holy Man', see also his *Egyptian Hermes*.

⁵¹ Fowden, 'Pagan Holy Man', p. 33.

⁵² On this latter point see Hankins, 'Lorenzo de' Medici as a Patron of Philosophy'.

imagined, and it was a time also when a relatively wide range of opinions was possible on various issues. With this background in mind, let us turn to the non-Plotinian aspects of Ficino's thought.

The Post-Plotinian Ficino

If one seeks the Plotinian in Ficino one will always find it. So one must be clear about what one is after. Are we looking for the rationalistic philosophical elements alone in Ficino's thought, i.e., those things which might be harmonized with the various genres of philosophizing which owe their origin to Aristotle, find powerful expression in the medieval and Renaissance university tradition, and were first divided up into recognizably modern categories in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? Or are we looking for a more complete picture—not just for Ficino the 'philosopher' but for Ficino the thinker? If the latter, then a Plotinian paradigm will not suffice.

Recognizing the non-Plotinian in Ficino means recognizing the exceptional status of Plotinus himself in later Platonism, as outlined above. Moreover, Ficino is at his most non-Plotinian when post-Plotinian Platonists presented theories that were more congruent with Christianity, themselves the result of similarities of mentality between fourth- and fifth-century Platonism and the Christianity of the same period. It is not just a question of sources, but of mentalities. In the following, I shall focus on three areas: the soteriological view of the enterprise of philosophy itself, not just from an individual but also from a societal point of view; the place of ritual in the philosophical life; and the nature of the individual soul and its relationship to the hypostatic Soul. Throughout we should note that some of these positions represent an expansion of the canon which both Iamblichus and Ficino achieved.

When Ficino writes, 'I love Plato in Iamblichus, I admire him in Plotinus, but I venerate him in Dionysius', it is reflective of his general view of the history of philosophy and of the post-Plotinian notion that the very enterprise of philosophy existed to save humankind.⁵³ It would be artificial if we separated 'philosophical' conceptions from

⁵³ *Opera omnia*, p. 925: 'Amo equidem Platonem in Iamblichio, admiror in Plotino, in Dionysio veneror.' Cited and translated in M. J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Florence, 1998, p. 67.

Ficino's religious views. Ficino's *prisca theologia* was his philosophy. He saw it as guided by divine providence, a gradual unfolding of a unitary wisdom which God chose to reveal to humankind for our benefit. In late ancient terms, it is useful to remember that post-Plotinian Platonists were the ones who articulated this idea most strongly, partly in response to the evolution of Christianity, which had by Iamblichus's day evolved a powerful soteriology of its own.

After Iamblichus the view of the enterprise of doing philosophy changed among Platonists. In a text possibly known to Ficino, Hierocles stressed the revelatory nature of philosophy and the notion that higher, purer souls communicated its messages to souls more weighed down by materiality.⁵⁴ Syrianus presented Socrates as the figure sent down to save.⁵⁵ In Proclus one sees repeatedly the notion that philosophy is a revealed truth which 'superior souls'—philosophers themselves—are sent to reveal to the rest of humanity.⁵⁶ In the 1484 preface to his *Platonis opera omnia*, dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici, Ficino wrote that:

Divine providence, which has the strength to achieve all things and the power to arrange all delightfully, magnanimous Lorenzo, has ordained that holy religion should not only be defended by prophets, sibyls and sacred doctors but also singularly be adorned by a pious and elegant philosophy. . . . Therefore almighty God sent down from on high the divine soul of Plato at the appointed time so that by his life, genius, and marvelous eloquence he might cast the light of holy religion among all peoples.⁵⁷

Ficino is influenced here by the later Platonist soteriological view of philosophy, perhaps especially the Proclan version, in which Plato

⁵⁴ See Hierocles, *In aureum Pythagoreorum carmen commentarius*, ed. by F. G. Koehler, Stuttgart, 1974, and O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, pp. 109–18. Hierocles's commentary was introduced to Quattrocento thinkers by the Sicilian-born humanist Giovanni Aurispa (1376–1459); for an edition and translation of Aurispa's preface to this text, see C. S. Celenza, *Piety and Pythagoras in Renaissance Florence: The Symbolism of Neoplatonism*, Leiden etc., 2001, Appendix.

⁵⁵ Syrianus's views in this regard are preserved in Hermias's commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*; see Hermias, *In Platonis Phaedrum scholia*, ed. by P. Couvreur, Paris, 1901; repr. with additions by C. Zintzen, Hildesheim, 1971, and O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, pp. 119–41.

⁵⁶ See O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, pp. 142–55, esp. p. 155, where he cites Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, ed. by E. Diehl, 3 vols, Leipzig, 1903–06, III, pp. 159, 29–160.12.

⁵⁷ Cited and translated in Allen, *Synoptic Art*, p. 7.

was the soteriological figure. In the *Theologia Platonica* (a title deliberately borrowed from Proclus), Ficino wrote that Plato was 'called divine by all without argument, and his doctrine was called "Theology" among all peoples'.⁵⁸ Ficino went on to say that:

Divine providence has decreed that the perverse wits of many men, who succumb none too easily to the authority of the divine law alone, might yield at least to the Platonic arguments that are fully supportive of religion. Providence has also decreed that those who have impiously made too great a separation between the study of philosophy and holy religion should at some point come to recognize that they have erred . . .⁵⁹

Because of the sort of cultural compression that a Renaissance thinker faced, given his sources and the nature of his exposure to them, we must acknowledge that Ficino could represent many sides of a given problem. Here he stressed the centrality of Plato; but other figures, notably Socrates and of course Christ, were also paradigmatic for Ficino in the special salvific merging of philosophical acuteness and religious wisdom which he felt compelled to reveal. As Michael Allen has recently pointed out, Ficino saw a number of parallels between the two figures.⁶⁰ In a letter to Paolo Ferobanti, Ficino is careful to state that 'Socrates, though not a type like Job or John the Baptist, was yet perhaps a foreshadowing of Christ, the author of our sal-

⁵⁸ Marsilio Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne de l'immortalité des âmes*, ed. and tr. by R. Marcel, 3 vols, Paris, 1964-70, I, p. 35: 'Quo factum est ut et ipse sine controversia divinus, et doctrina eius apud omnes gentes Theologia nuncuparetur, cum nihil usquam sive morale, sive dialecticum, aut mathematicum, aut physicum tractet, quin mox ad contemplationem cultumque Dei summa cum pietate reducat.'

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37: 'Reor autem, nec vana fides, hoc providentia divina decretum, ut et perversa multorum ingenia, quae soli divinae legis auctoritati haud facile cedunt, platoniciis saltem rationibus religioni admodum suffragantibus acquiescant, et quicumque philosophiae studium impie nimium a sancta religione seiungunt agnoscant aliquando se non aliter aberrare . . .'. The *Theologia Platonica* was written from 1469 to 1474 and first printed in 1482.

⁶⁰ Allen, *Synoptic Art*, pp. 127-28, expounds Ficino's view in the letter that Socrates, like Christ, 'concentrated on care of soul, not body; dedicated himself to gentleness, charity, and true love, and to combating pride, particularly intellectual pride; . . . he had been sent by God exclusively for this mission . . . he had expostulated with his unjust judges even as he had turned the other cheek; had endured execution with steadfastness', and points out other parallels which Ficino saw, 'that Socrates was seized for thirty pieces of silver; that he had prophesied; that after his death heaven immediately avenged him; that during the evening prior to death he had instituted a 'washing' . . . that . . . we hear of a cup and a blessing; and that in dying he mentioned a cockerel'. See also Allen's edition and translation of the letter in *Synoptic Art*, Appendix 1, pp. 209-12.

vation: he served as a preparatory signal, so to speak.⁶¹ Ficino is determined to look for soteriological figures where he can find them and to expand this search to the widest reaches of the Platonic tradition. It is not that he is being heterodox; rather, he is expanding the boundaries of orthodoxy by expanding the canon of materials suitable for philosophico-religious hermeneutic, in the same way that Iamblichus had self-consciously expanded the canon of Platonist works by including what he saw as 'Egyptian' and 'Chaldaean' writings. In his commitment to welding Platonism and Christianity together Ficino is compelled to find parallels and relationships between the two traditions—or rather, he is reflecting one tradition: the late ancient one that sought a unitary philosophical and religious wisdom, whose adherents included members as diverse as Iamblichus and Augustine, Numenius and Lactantius, who, even if they may have disagreed on specific points of doctrine, were concerned to unite ethics and metaphysics of a high order with a rich, ritually intense religiosity.

The place and efficacy of ritual is another point of similarity between the post-Plotinian tradition and Ficino's interests, and it is tied to his views on the nature of the human soul. We recall that Iamblichus believed it was necessary for philosophers to use theurgic ritual as a means of purification and preparation for ascent; this suggested a broadening of vision regarding the capacity of human beings to operate on the world around them. Dependent on the notion of sympathies in the universe between entities at various ontological levels, Iamblichus's importation of the practice of using these sympathies into the *métier* of the philosopher was reflective of a larger, late ancient search for practices that would transmit the divine to the human. This signaled a view of the human soul's capacity that was different from that of Plotinus, at once humbler and, paradoxically, more ambitious. It is humbler in the sense that Iamblichus recognized the radical individuality of the human soul; he assumed an essential disconnection from the divine but believed we could reach the divine by using the aids placed in the world around us. At the same time, it was ambitious, for it suggested we could manipulate the natural world to our advantage. How is this vision manifested in Ficino's work? First, let us look at Ficino's view on the individual soul and its relation to the hypostatic Soul.

⁶¹ Ed. in Allen, *Synoptic Art*, Appendix 1.

From a Christian perspective, the individual unity of the human soul was necessary, and for a variety of reasons. Individual reward and punishment would be impossible without substantial unity, and one could veer dangerously close to certain of the heretical aspects of Averroism, especially the problem of the unity of the intellect, if one did not maintain the individual soul's substantial unity. If there was one unified intellect in which all individuals participated, radical individuality was destroyed. Ficino spent Book XV of his *Theologia Platonica* refuting the heresy of Averroes. Unlike some of the more malleable heterodox topics in pre-Tridentine Europe, this was a heresy of long-standing which the Church had officially condemned since Bishop Tempier's condemnation of 1277.⁶² Clearly the heterodox aspect of positing a substantial link between the human and the divine was something Ficino wished to avoid. Moreover, by maintaining the psychic individuality of the human subject, Ficino could more easily offer an integrated philosophical approach of his own which stressed not only the individual immortality of the human soul but also its power and agency in the world.

Beyond his anti-Averroist polemic, it is clear that Ficino views the human soul as a radical individual. It is separate from body and is in Ficino's conception near God and Angel; soul's proximity to these two levels (similar to Plotinus's One and Nous) allows God and Angel to confer immortality on the soul, just as soul's proximity to matter can sometimes drag it down,⁶³ but there is not a part of each individual human soul in them. The immortal soul is indivisible, and 'since it is indivisible it does not take on divisible and corporeal qualities'.⁶⁴ It has its existence in its essence (*Theologia Platonica*, V.7) and has its own existence and never recedes from its form (*TP*, V.8). It has a natural inclination toward the divine,⁶⁵ but not because there

⁶² For the text of the condemnation see *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, ed. by H. Denifle and A. Chatelain, 4 vols, Paris, 1889–97, I, pp. 543–55. On the condemnation see R. Hissette, *Enquête sur les 219 articles condamnés à Paris le 7 Mars 1277*, Louvain, 1977, and O. Lottin, *Psychologie et morale aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, 6 vols in 7, Paris, 1942–60, esp. I, pp. 225–389.

⁶³ Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne*, V.3 (ed. Marcel, I, p. 176): 'Anima vero quae distat longius, etsi in operandi facultate corporalem aliquam percipit passionem, in essentia tamen passionis est expers. Et sicut corpus ex materia et quantitate passivum inhaerentem sibi qualitatem reddit subiectam corruptioni, ita Deus et angelus activi animam sibi proximam et a corpore segregatam divinitate sua efficiunt immortalem.'

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, V.6 (ed. Marcel, I, p. 184): 'Praeterea, cum indivisibilis sit, divisibiles et corporeas non suscipit qualitates. Non enim quod divisibile est tangit indivisibile.'

⁶⁵ See *ibid.*, V.10, and Kristeller, *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino*, revised edn, Florence, 1989, pp. 180–212 and 247–73.

is an actual part of the human soul left in the divine.⁶⁶ Late medieval Christianity, from Ockham to Martin Luther, realized all too clearly the gulf between the human and the divine.⁶⁷ Even the Platonist Ficino could not have gone as far as Plotinus on this point. But Ficino is not without optimism regarding the possibility of humans using God-given aids to reach the divine. Here we find him adopting Iamblichan and post-Iamblichan approaches to ritual, themselves a reflection of the trend to see a gulf between the human and the divine—not an unbridgeable one, but a gulf nonetheless—coupled with the notion that the divine has offered us certain material things to help us transcend the gulf. With the right use of these material things, which means with the right sort of ritual approach, we can complete the search, as it is in our power to do, successfully.

On the one hand, Ficino views the scholarly life as melancholy, under the sign of Saturn.⁶⁸ Human life itself is a melancholy affair, since we have been given a natural appetite for God which in this life is destined to go unsatisfied.⁶⁹ On the other hand, he sees the human soul as empowered, both because of its own virtues, as we can see in the case of prophecy, and because of its power to operate on the world around it using material things and rituals. Let us examine these in turn.

In 1478, the year of the Pazzi conspiracy, Ficino wrote to Pope Sixtus IV about the effects the relics of St Peter had had in the previous year.⁷⁰ Ficino suggests that they were so powerful as to have

⁶⁶ Ficino speaks of the soul's descent in his comments on Plato's *Phaedrus*, ed. by M. J. B. Allen in his *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer*, Berkeley etc., 1981; see esp. *Summae* 23–25 at pp. 158–73. It is important to note, however, that Ficino in these passages will speak of the soul 'contemplating' the intelligibles and being in the presence of the divine, but not as having left a substantial part of itself behind after its incorporation. See also Allen's *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of his 'Phaedrus' Commentary, its Sources and Genesis*, Berkeley etc., 1984, pp. 165–84, esp. p. 182, where Allen highlights the complexities in the Plotinian system.

⁶⁷ See H. A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, Cambridge, Mass., 1963.

⁶⁸ See Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed. and tr. by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark, Binghamton, NY, 1989, esp. Bk 1, and the introduction of Kaske at pp. 21–24.

⁶⁹ See Ficino, *Epistolarum liber II*, 'Quaestiones quinque de mente', in *Opera omnia*, pp. 675–82.

⁷⁰ *Epistolarum liber VI*, in *Opera omnia*, pp. 813–15 (English version in *Letters*, V, pp. 15–19). See P. O. Kristeller, 'Marsilio Ficino and the Roman Curia', *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, 34A (1985), pp. 83–98, at pp. 88–92 (repr. in his *Studies*, IV, pp. 265–80); and Fubini, 'Ficino e i Medici', and idem, 'Ancora su Ficino e i Medici' (as n. 3 above).

been the cause of twelve miracles that occurred within a month, among them a set of prophecies. Sixtus was predicted to be someone who would accomplish great things. In a gloomier vein, Ficino and his *conphilosophi* who were examining the relics also saw that in the following year there would be war and plague (*Opera*, p. 813). The framing of the letter is interesting: Ficino sent the papal prophecy through a friend, Giovanni Niccolini, the archbishop of Amalfi. In the letter Ficino sends to Niccolini introducing the prophecy, he is conscious of the possible risks he might be taking.⁷¹ Adumbrating sentiments that he was to advocate eleven years later in the *Apologia* to *De vita*, Ficino suggests that 'If this prophecy is read in the state of mind in which it has been written, it would offend no one at all. For divine truth joined with love should not offend anyone.' He goes on:

Therefore before you present this prophecy, take counsel not only with yourself but also particularly with those who are closest to the Pope. So if you think it can be received by everyone with as much good grace as there was goodwill in its composition, then let it be read to the Pope and others. But if not, then keep it to yourself. For if nothing can help us, I do not wish anything to do us harm.

Already Ficino is in the difficult zone between political efficaciousness and liminality that a late ancient model holy man had occupied.

Commenting on the Pythagorean saying 'Nourish the cock, but do not sacrifice him, since he is sacred to the sun and moon', Ficino expounds the prophetic powers which he believes the soul possesses. His treatment betrays the fact that in his view it is not altogether within our capacity to access these powers. Sleep and dreams are sometimes necessary. 'There is a certain power of the soul', he writes, 'which by a kind of affinity of celestial bodies and spirits is often summoned in such a fashion that it may predict the future.' He goes on:

Still, it is a recognition which is sometimes so confused and ambiguous that one can scarcely say what it predicts. This is the source of auguries in dreams, of various sorts of visions, of mutations of souls. For sometimes the mind, foreknowing of evil, seems to instill grief, but foreknowledge of good seems to instill a certain happiness.⁷²

⁷¹ *Epistolarum liber VI*, in *Opera omnia*, p. 816 (*Letters*, V, pp. 21–22).

⁷² P. O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2 vols, Florence, 1937; repr. Florence, 1973, II, p. 101: 'Est vis quedam anime que cognatione quadam celestium corporum et spirituum sepe ita cietur ut futura presagiat. Est tamen agnitio illa inter-

The power is often unconscious, and we can be unaware that we possess it. However, 'when the spirit is tranquil and removed from anxious cares and stimuli, which happens to a great extent during sleep, the spirit thoroughly senses certain movements of related causes'.⁷³ In a 1479 letter to Bernardo Bembo, Ficino reports a miraculous healing dream. Ficino, ill, had prayed to God and to Mary when Bembo appeared to him in a dream, 'promising . . . an early return to good health. Waking up', Ficino goes on, 'I was almost well, and in a short time I recovered completely.'⁷⁴ We do have to try to purify ourselves and live tranquilly, but prophecy is not entirely under our control.⁷⁵

This lack of control over various psychic phenomena is complemented throughout Ficino's work by his neo-Iamblichian appreciation of the use and power of ritual. Ficino performed at least two exorcisms; in one, to cast out the offending spirit, he writes that he used *orationes* and *sacrae expiationes*. But, he tells us, 'men cannot do these things without God'.⁷⁶ God has provided the means by which

dum ita confusa atque ambigua ut vix quid presagiat affirmare quis possit. Inde somniorum auguria, inde visionum species, inde animum mutationes. Nam interdum mali mens presaga merorem, boni autem prescientia [presentia *cod.*] letitiam quandam infundere videtur.' I have translated in accordance with Kristeller's suggestion of 'prescientia' for 'presentia' at *Supplementum Ficinianum*, II, p. 103, n. 2.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Epistolarum liber VI* (Latin text is given in *Letters*, V, p. 139, translated on p. 33; the text is also in *Opera omnia*, p. 821): 'Divinam praeterea providentiam nos invicem devinxisse ex eo potissimum afferro quod eo anno quo primum orator Florentiam accessisti quarto fere ante accessum mense mihi graviter egrotanti statim post votum quoddam pro salute Deo divaeque Mariae suppliciter institutum visus es certe tum primum nobis notus in somniis, ante prorsus incognitus, citam prosperamque valitudinem polliceri. Expergefactus pene sanus brevi prorsus convalui.'

⁷⁵ Ficino gives notice of an oneiric prophecy made by his mother in a letter to Matteo Corsini, in *Epistolarum liber I* (*Opera omnia*, pp. 615–16). There are pieces on Renaissance oneirology, especially as it pertains to Ficino and his relationship to late antiquity, in *Accademia. Revue de la Société Marsile Ficin*, 1 (1999).

⁷⁶ *Opera*, pp. 1469–70 (Argument 24 to the *Timaeus*): 'Pondera movent, in obscuribus habitant plurimum, inter sordes eiusmodi daemonem hoc anno millesimo quadragentesimo nonagesimo tertio, Octobris mense, in vetustissima et caduca et obscura quadam Galileae familiae domo deprehendi Florentiae duos iam menses domesticos infestantem, quem pluribus argumentis esse, quasi brutum Saturniumque iudicavi, daemonium mutum spiritumque immundum. Iussi igitur post orationes sacrasque expiationes, mundari sordibus domum totam, electis odoribus saepe affici, dealbari, illuminari, ornari, ne domus ulterius foret habitaculum immundo spiritui consentaneum . . .'. The filthy Saturnian demon immediately began to argue because it did not like the clean and Jovial things it was subject to ('disputavit subito Saturnius et sordidus ille daemon, cui videlicet munda et Iovialia displicerent'). Later Ficino cast out another demon from his shoemaker Francesco's house; then he goes on to

we can operate; we have the freedom to choose to use them, and our reason alone cannot allow us to understand the divine mysteries. Instead we must purify ourselves to become more like God.⁷⁷

In *De vita*, Ficino's approach is conditioned by the Iamblichan and post-Iamblichan concern for manipulating the universe around us by using rituals and objects that have been divinely placed for our use. At the outset he writes: 'let no man wonder that Soul can be allured as it were by material forms, since indeed she herself has created baits of this kind suitable to herself, to be allured thereby, and she always and willingly dwells in them.' (*De vita*, III.1: pp. 244–45)⁷⁸ For Ficino the hypostatic Soul makes specific forms and powers pertaining to species of things below, and does this through their respective reasons with the aid of the stars and the celestial forms (*De vita*, III.1: pp. 246–47). He fears transcending orthodoxy, even as he obviously recognizes its malleability (*De vita*, III.8: pp. 280–81): 'Let us by no means ever attempt anything forbidden by holy religion.' He stresses throughout that he does not *affirm* any practices contrary to the faith; but he does not deny their possibility, and he cannot resist joining ancient testimony of a practice's efficacy to one of these 'non-affirmations'. Some, he writes, himself included, doubt that images have celestial power (*De vita*, III.15: pp. 320–21); 'were it not that all antiquity and all astrologers think they have a wonderful power, I would deny it . . .'. 'In order to interpret Plotinus [*ad Plotinum interpretandum*]', he avers (*ibid.*),

I will then briefly adduce what can be alleged from the opinions of magicians and astrologers in favor of images . . . provided I will have warned you here at the outset that you must not think I approve the use of images, only recount it. For as for me, I use medicines tempered in accordance with the heavens . . .

Ficino is truly 'interpreting', or even 'translating' Plotinus, so that Plotinus becomes who Ficino needs him to be: not the Plotinus of

say 'Non enim homines haec efficere sine Deo possunt.' Are the *orationes sacraeque expiationes* the τελεταί of Synesius, which in his translation of Synesius (*Opera omnia*, p. 1969) Ficino renders as *expiationes solennitatesque*? See Copenhaver, 'Iamblichus, Synesius and the Chaldaean Oracles' (as n. 11 above), p. 447.

⁷⁷ *Epistolarum liber VIII*, 'divina mysteria rationibus comprehendendi non posse, sed puritate mentis Deo persimiles denique fieri', in *Opera omnia*, p. 867.

⁷⁸ In what follows I give the section numbers of *De vita* followed by the page numbers in the edition (*Three Books on Life*) of Kaske and Clark. On the cited passage, see Copenhaver, 'Iamblichus, Synesius and the Chaldaean Oracles'.

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—an island of post-Kantian rationality in a sea of ritualistic late ancient decadence—but rather a *priscus theologus* in whose work lay buried much of the ancient theology's power. A bit later, Ficino writes (*De vita*, III.18: pp. 340–41):

It would be unduly curious and perhaps harmful to recite what images they fashioned and how, for the mutual meeting of minds or their alienation, for bringing felicity or inflicting calamity, either to some individual, or to a household, or to a city. I do not affirm that such things can be done. Astrologers, however, think such things can be done, and they teach the method, but I dare not tell it. Porphyry in the book where he sketches the life of his master Plotinus confirms that such can be done.

Ficino reads Porphyry and Plotinus through Iamblichian eyes, since Porphyry's point in his life of Plotinus was not to show the efficacy of magic but to show his master's great-souled nature in resisting it.⁷⁹ Ficino goes on to recount the incident, but his intentions are clear: to draw Plotinus and Porphyry into the orbit of the affirmation of magic, though they would have denigrated it, at least in the philosophical life. Later, Ficino discusses the power of images over spirit and spirit over images, as well as the emotional state of the user and operator (*De vita*, III.20: p. 351). He denies that images have long-range effects, thinking rather that they affect only the wearer and that what force 'they do have is caused by the material rather than the figure, and, as I said, I prefer medicines to images by far. Yet the Arabs and the Egyptians ascribe so much power to statues and images fashioned by astronomical and magical art that they believe the spirits of the stars are enclosed in them . . .'⁸⁰

The divine has implanted things we can use in the cosmos, things inaccessible to reason, or at least to unaided reason (*De vita*, III.12: pp. 298–301):

⁷⁹ See Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*, 10; in Ficino's translation *Opera*, p. 1541.

⁸⁰ Ficino himself is aware of the range of his hermeneutic. See *De vita*, III.26, pp. 384–85: 'But lest we digress too long from what we initially started to do, interpreting Plotinus . . .', and *ibid.*, p. 391: 'Iamblichus demonstrates that true and certain prophecy cannot come from such evil daemons, nor is it produced by human arts or by nature; it is only produced in purified minds by divine inspiration. But now let us get back to Hermes, or rather Plotinus . . .'.

At the same time we do not say that our spirit is prepared for the celestials only through qualities of things known to the senses, but also and much more through certain properties engrafted in things from the heavens and hidden from our senses, and hence only with difficulty known to our reason.⁸¹

He recognizes that Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas disagreed about images. Albert went so far as to describe the images that could be used for evil ends, in order to distinguish between what was licit and what was not (*De vita*, III.18: pp. 340–43).⁸² Aquinas attributed the efficacy of images to deceiving demons; thus Ficino writes (*ibid.*) ‘insofar as he [Aquinas] requires it, I give them [images] no credit at all’.⁸³ Yet even here it is worth noting that the age of Aquinas was the very time when diabolology as a science was being born, with Aquinas himself one of its principal architects. Formal means of prosecuting heresies had only been around for a very short time, so Aquinas was necessarily very cautious in his affirmations.⁸⁴ Aquinas’s caution, one can see, is something Ficino accepts, but his acceptance is not permeated with the same sort of enthusiasm we find in other parts of *De vita*.

For Ficino as for Iamblichus, the use of various theurgic means is part of a larger system, one not to be abused for personal advan-

⁸¹ Another noteworthy passage along those lines occurs at *De vita*, III.22, pp. 368–69, where Ficino discusses what he means when he says ‘celestial goods descend to us.’ One way this occurs is ‘that the goods of celestial souls partly leap forth into this our spirit through rays, and from there overflow into our souls and partly come straight from their souls or from angels into human souls which have been exposed to them—exposed, I say, not so much by some natural means as by the election of free will or by affection.’ Concluding, he writes: ‘In summary, consider that those who by prayer, by study, by manner of life, and by conduct imitate the beneficence, action, and order of the celestials, since they are more similar to the gods, receive fuller gifts from them . . .’. Again, the discourse is about making our soul similar to the divine through will but not about actually having a part of the soul essentially divine, as in Plotinus.

⁸² Albert, *Speculum astronomiae*, ed. by S. Caroti, M. Pereira, and S. Zamponi, Pisa, 1977, pp. 32.103–39 and 47.1–21, cited by Kaske and Clark, *Three Books on Life*, p. 449, n. 28; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, III.104–07 (in vols XIII–XV of his *Opera omnia*, Leonine edition, 47 vols, Rome, 1882–1971), cited by Kaske and Clark, p. 450, n. 31; see also their notes 32–34 and the notes to III.17 at pp. 444–46. In general see B. P. Copenhaver, ‘Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in the *De Vita* of Marsilio Ficino’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 37 (1984), pp. 523–54.

⁸³ See Copenhaver, ‘Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic’, and *idem*, ‘Renaissance Magic and Neoplatonic Philosophy: *Ennead* 4, 3–5 in Ficino’s *De vita coelitus comparanda*’, in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Studi e documenti*, ed. by G. C. Garfagnini, 2 vols, Florence, 1986, II, pp. 351–69.

⁸⁴ See J. B. Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca, NY, 1972, pp. 101–65.

tage. It is important for the practitioner not to be deceived by maleficent demons along the way; so the use of images is an especially dangerous and worrisome topic. Ficino's interpretation of Porphyry on a certain image-related point, makes his motivation clear (*De vita*, III.13: pp. 306–07):

Porphyry also in his *Letter to Anebo* testifies that images are efficacious; and he adds that by certain vapors arising from fumigations proper to them, aerial daemons would instantly be insinuated into them.⁸⁵ Iamblichus confirms that in materials which are naturally akin to the things above and have been both collected from their various places and compounded at the right time and in the proper manner, you can receive forces and effects which are not only celestial, but even daemonic and divine. Proclus and Synesius absolutely agree.

Here Ficino's interest is apparent, so much so that he does not focus on the difference of opinion between Porphyry and Iamblichus. Porphyry had granted various theurgic means a certain efficacy but had ultimately, especially in the *Letter to Anebo*, denied their worthiness for the true philosopher; Iamblichus had insisted on their necessity, even in the philosophical life, always advising caution and insisting that lower theurgic techniques be used as preparatory for higher ones, whose final goal was *henosis*—unification with the One. Ficino, however, chooses to emphasize their similarity, reading Porphyry through Iamblichian eyes.

Later in the *De Vita*, Ficino goes on:

For Iamblichus too says that those who place their trust in images alone, caring less about the highest religion and holiness, and who hope for divine gifts from them, are very often deceived in this matter by evil daemons encountering them under the pretense of being good divinities. Iamblichus does not deny, however, that certain natural goods come to pass from images constructed according to a legitimate astrological plan.

In fact, continues Ficino, it is safer to trust oneself to the use of material means, in this case medicine. Images, however, possess power not because of the figure imposed on them; rather, their efficacy is due to the natural disposition of the material of which they are

⁸⁵ On this point see M. J. B. Allen, 'Summoning Plotinus: Ficino, Smoke, and the Strangled Chickens', in *Reconsidering the Renaissance*, ed. by M. Di Cesare, Binghamton, NY, 1992, pp. 63–88, now in Allen, *Plato's Third Eye: Studies in Marsilio Ficino's Metaphysics and its Sources*, Aldershot, 1995, art. XIV.

crafted (*De vita*, III.18: pp. 342–43).⁸⁶ Moreover, ‘we ought not rashly to allow even the shadow of idolatry’ (*ibid.*).

The specter of heterodoxy haunts Ficino throughout the *De vita*, and it is something he must combat. When he does, two things are apparent: first, the notion that it is possible to discuss these things and debate them; this is not a closed system. Second, also apparent are his post-Plotinian tendencies. While vigorously rejecting anything not approved by the Church, Ficino employs what is really a topos of humility to defend his notion of life in the cosmos, life given to it by the divine, and, also by divine gift, accessible to us. Ficino too reflects Iamblichus’s opening up of the traditional canon. One of his defenses concerns the possible charge that he is a priest, one who should not be busying himself with medicine and astrology. But it is necessary to note, stresses Ficino, that ancient priests, those of the Chaldeans, Persians, and Egyptians, were doctors and astronomers (*De vita, Apologia*: pp. 396–97). To help effect a sound mind in a sound body it is necessary to join medicine with the priesthood. Even Christ enjoined his disciples to cure the sick and, in Ficino’s view, would himself have advocated using herbs and stones to effect cures, if words alone were ineffective.

In the case of another hypothetical objection, Ficino states that he is not advocating magic, just recounting it in his interpretation of Plotinus. ‘Nor’, he writes,

do I affirm here a single word about profane magic which depends upon the worship of daemons, but I mention natural magic, which, by natural things, seeks to obtain the services of the celestials for the prosperous health of our bodies. This power, it seems, must be granted to minds which use it legitimately, as medicine and agriculture are justly granted, and all the more so as that activity which joins heavenly things to earthly is more perfect. Neoplatonic Philosophy’, and Hirai’s paper in this volume.⁸⁷

The magus is like a farmer, practicing an art as natural, patterned and subject to the seasons as that of farming. How could people be so arrogant as to deny life to the heavens? How could people who see life in even the lowest animals and the vilest grasses not see life

⁸⁶ For the way the power of images is tied to Ficino’s adaptation of the seminal reasons (λόγοι σπερματικοί) of Plotinus, see Copenhaver, ‘Renaissance Magic and Neoplatonic Philosophy’. See also Hirai’s paper in this volume.

⁸⁷ *De vita, Apologia*, pp. 396–97.

in heaven and in the world?⁸⁸ Perhaps the world does not possess a soul, but must we not grant the world at least some sort of life, a life which God, not being greedy, granted to us to use?

In the final analysis, one is struck not by the arrogance of a heterodox non-conformist but by the humility with which Ficino attempts to reimagine the world and the place of humankind within it. His non-Plotinian tendencies accord us a certain power in manipulating the world even as he recognizes humanity's radical dependence on divine aid, a dependence which is truly, intimately psychological, and which recognizes the melancholy truth that our soul, with all its natural desires to reach the divine, is fated in this life not to do so.

⁸⁸ *De vita, Apologia*, pp. 398–99: 'Quidnam agis et tu, strenue Soderine noster? Tolerabisne superstitiosos caecosque nescio quos futuros, qui vitam in animalibus vel abiectissimis herbisque vilissimis manifestam vident, in coelo, in mundo, non vident?'

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FICINO, AUGUSTINE AND THE PAGANS¹

Anthony Levi

It is at first sight paradoxical that Ficino should so ostentatiously have claimed the authority of Augustine for a life work which centred on the Christian rehabilitation of the pagan philosophy which Augustine spurned. The paradox is only apparent. Ficino resolved it by his resolute Christianization of Plato. He relied partly on the Plotinian interpretation of Plato in Augustine, and partly on Neoplatonist elements derived from elsewhere, strengthening the result by assertions of the Mosaic and therefore revealed origins of Plato's doctrine. He leant on the tradition that Plato had heard the doctrine of the Pentateuch in Egypt, where it had been transmitted from Moses and from the original revelation by God to Hermes Trismegistus passed on through the chain of *prisci theologi*.

Especially in his later work, Ficino contrived to present what he took to be the philosophy of Plato as divine in origin and metaphysically as well as morally Christian in content. The questions which we have to address are, firstly, why Ficino found it necessary for the purposes of what he intended to be a Christian apologetic to turn to Plato, or at least to what we know as Neoplatonism, and, secondly, what inspiration he derived from Augustine. The answers to these questions lead us directly to an understanding of the real nature of the hugely important contribution which Ficino made to the development of western culture.

By the end of the thirteenth century, the scholastics can be shown already to have failed in their effort to provide a coherent rational substructure to support revealed doctrine. Ficino was to provide Christianity with an alternative form of doctrinally orthodox moral and mystical theology which also allowed a greatly elevated view of natural human potential.

The three most important flaws in scholastic thought, all of which

¹ This paper sums up a major part of the argument of my forthcoming book, *Renaissance and Reformation: The Intellectual Genesis*, New Haven, Conn., 2002.

must concern us, were by the late thirteenth century built into the terminology itself of scholastic debate. No theology using scholastic categories could be constructed which would support the Christian religion inherited from Augustine by the West. In epistemology, the twelfth century had offered the choice between nominalism, whereby universal ideas existed only as mental categories, and only individual objects existed in the external world, and realism, in which universal ideas, like 'treeness', were compounded with an individualized existence in external objects, and were abstracted by the human mind in the act of knowing.

It was argued that the nominalist position could be shown inevitably to lead either to tritheism or to a triple incarnation, but that realism left cognition and all other human spiritual functions dependent on perception, and therefore on bodily organs which corrupted after death. But Christianity, in this like Islam but unlike Judaism, depended on the survival after death of the spiritual functions of the individual. Realism therefore seemed in the thirteenth century to compromise the immortality of the soul. Only some form of illuminist theory of knowledge which was not dependent on sense perception, such as that developed by Bonaventure and derived from Augustine, appeared to offer any way of avoiding the nominalist-realist dilemma.

For William of Auvergne, for example, Bishop of Paris from 1228 to 1249, the validity of universal ideas derived directly from God's actions in impressing on our minds our abstract ideas of the sensible world. What for the Arab commentators on Aristotle had been the task of the *intellectus agens* is for William replaced by Augustine's special divine act for each human act of cognition. Every human act of knowing becomes an individual miracle. Ficino avoided this conclusion and by-passed the scholastic debate. But it was the threat to the soul's immortality which determined the whole thrust of his apologetic.

Scholastic theology arose largely from the adoption of a quasi-Aristotelian model to deal with the legacy of Augustine to the Western church. Its principal stronghold was Paris, soon supported by Cologne and Louvain, and it held sway in Spain, England, and south of the Alps. East of the Rhine its hegemony, even in regions such as Bohemia or the Danube basin, where special circumstances prevailed, was much weaker, and its influence is scarcely to be discovered in Greece, or anywhere outside the territory of the Latin rite. Significantly those parts of Europe which experienced the Renaissance were virtually

co-terminous with those dominated by scholastic theology, a further fact of importance in assessing the role played by Ficino in the development of western culture. It was because he was aware that Augustine's legacy included the Plotinian metaphysics of the early works written at Cassiciacum, and from which Augustine derived the convoluted proofs of the soul's immortality in *De immortalitate animae* of 387, that Ficino was able to remain faithful to Augustine while repudiating virtually the totality of what Aristotelian scholasticism had done with its Augustinian inheritance.

The second and third of the catastrophic flaws in late medieval scholastic theology were even more directly linked to Augustinian thought than had been the epistemological debates. The second comes from *De trinitate*, where, in Books IX to XI, and then in Book XIV, Augustine is casting round for the image of God in human beings to which Genesis I:26 refers. After discarding two triads, Augustine settles on the famous set of intellect, memory and will, for which at IX.9.14 he begins to use the term *voluntas*. There is no word in Greek for volitive psychic energy directed towards a specific object, but Augustine's reference to a *voluntas* incorporated that term into the standard terminology of Christian anthropology. Aquinas in the *Summa* understands it as a 'faculty' of the soul, but follows the principle laid down by Aristotle in *De anima* that the powers of the soul are distinguished by their acts, and their acts by their objects.²

Aquinas allows a real distinction between the soul and its operative faculties, and all the scholastics accept that the object of the intellect is the true, and that of the will, the good. The result of this development of the Augustinian isolation of the will as a power of the soul was to be devastating. In human beings, scholastic anthropology allowed no way of explaining the integration of cognitive and volitive elements in the act of choice.³ In God the distinction between divine reason and divine will immediately raised the problems of predestination, urgent before the end of the thirteenth century. In the relationship between God and his human creation, it forced theologians to debate whether human morality was a function of the divine intellect, imposing rules written into the structure of both

² Augustine's discussion is in *De trinitate*, from X.11.17 to X.12.19. For Aquinas, see the *Summa theologica*, Pars 1a, q.lxxix, art. 1, relying on Aristotle, *De anima*, II.4, 415a, 18-22, and Pars 1a, q.lxxvii, art. 3.

³ On this question, see J. Lebacqz, *Libre arbitre et jugement*, Louvain, 1960.

divine and human natures, or an arbitrary decree of the divine will, making human acts intrinsically indifferent, good or evil only because God decreed them to be so.

The third catastrophic flaw built in to the terminology of late medieval scholasticism concerns the concept of human nature. Augustine had regarded Adam as created with aspirations to fulfilment in the vision of God. 'Nature' had passed from an elevated state before sin to a fallen state after it. 'Pure nature', neither elevated nor fallen, had never actually existed. In the context of defining what was 'natural' in earthly human experience, what had been lost with original sin, and what required the gratuitous gift of God, it was necessary to work out what in actual experience derived from human nature, and what from the intervention of divine grace made possible by the Redemption.⁴

Aquinas clearly regarded fallen human nature as still endowed with an aspiration to supernatural fulfilment, but later scholastics increasingly, and by the late fifteenth century almost universally, spoke of 'supernature' as something added to pure nature like a tier on a wedding cake. Human nature itself was bereft of any aspiration to supernatural fulfilment, and even accepting proffered justification was regarded as beyond its capabilities, later, at the end of the sixteenth century, to be called 'semi-Pelagian'. No free human act could lead to supernatural justification, which had to be the result of a divine initiative, necessarily irresistible. The irreconcilability of free will with a non-Pelagian theology of justification became inevitable. The only way to make the acceptance of justifying grace compatible with human moral acts was to endow redeemed nature itself with aspirations to fulfilment in the supernatural order. That meant allowing salvation to 'pagans', a consequence about which Ficino hesitated, but from which in the end he did not shrink.

The derivation of these three irresolvable dilemmas of scholastic theology from Augustine is important for a study of Ficino's role in the cultural history of the West only because it helps to explain why Ficino built on Augustine's massive authority to subvert what we have incautiously come to regard as the whole Augustinian theological tradition, inaccurately isolating and misconstruing its anti-Pelagian elements. Ficino was responding to cultural constraints which

⁴ See Henri de Lubac, *Augustinisme et théologie moderne*, Paris, 1964.

went wide and deep in Quattrocento Italy, but part of his skill was in exploiting the authority of Augustine himself in his reconstitution of a basis to support the new re-assertions of human dignity, and to repudiate what had come to be regarded as the Augustinian tradition of scholastic thought. It is important to notice that, with the exception of the *Confessiones* of 401, *De trinitate* of 414, the *Enchiridion* of 421, and *De civitate Dei* written between 413 and 425, all of which constitute special cases, Ficino quotes only from Augustine's earliest works, written between 386 and 393.⁵ He uses Augustine's authority wherever he can to refute what we know as Augustinianism. Erasmus was to do much the same, and for similar reasons, nearly half a century later.

It was the theology of Ockham, who died in 1349, which had by the early fourteenth century led to an emphasis on God's transcendence, to the unchristian extent of making his moral order fundamentally arbitrary. That made even clearer the incompatibility of scholastic categories with any genuinely Christian spirituality. The Arab glosses on Aristotle, although themselves impregnated with Neoplatonism, had tended to interpret the role of the *intellectus agens* in the act of knowledge in such a way as to make the survival after death of the individual human soul unintelligible.

Petrarch was the first major figure to realize the implications of what had happened to Christian theology, tentatively to turn his back on the scholastics, and to address himself to the fundamental attack on human dignity contained in the Arab glosses on Aristotle which compromised the immortality of the soul. Petrarch (1304–74) consciously returned to the spirituality of Augustine, and closely identified himself from early in his career with the author of the *Confessiones* and *De civitate Dei*. He also sought to revive the moral

⁵ Raymond Marcel, on whose work this paper much relies, supplies references to Augustine in the notes to his edition of the *Theologia Platonica de animorum immortalitate* (*Théologie platonicienne de l'immortalité des âmes*, ed. and tr. by R. Marcel, 3 vols, Paris, 1964–70) and gives in *Marsile Ficin (1433–1499)*, Paris, 1958, p. 645, the same list of Augustine's works quoted by Ficino as is given by E. Garin and P. O. Kristeller. See the treatments of Augustine's influence on Ficino in E. Garin, 'S. Agostino e Marsilio Ficino', *Bollettino storico agostiniano*, 16 (1940), pp. 41–47; P. O. Kristeller, 'Augustine and the Early Renaissance', in *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, 4 vols, Rome, 1956–96, I, pp. 355–72 (reprinted from *The Review of Religion*, 8 (1944), pp. 339–59); and several articles by Alessandra Tarabochia Canavero, esp. 'S. Agostino nella *Teologia Platonica* di Marsilio Ficino', *Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica*, 70 (1978), pp. 626–46.

values to be found in pagan antiquity, which were nearer to those of the Sermon on the Mount and more liberal than many of those governing medieval justice and ideals of virtue. He thereby inaugurated the upheaval in social and personal values which developed into what we have come to call the Renaissance.

It was in 1456, a century after Petrarch, that, according to Ficino's letter to Valori of 24 November 1491, Landino had read to Cosimo Ficino's four now lost books of *Institutiones Platonicæ*. The title invites us to consider the work in relation to the *Institutiones divinae* of Lactantius. Moreover the author of the *Vita secunda* of Ficino asserts that, since Ficino's Greek was still inadequate for him to read the Platonic texts in the original, he had to rely for knowledge of 'i dogmi Platonici' on Augustine 'and some other Latin Platonists'.⁶ Not only are Augustine's early philosophical works deeply indebted to Plotinus,⁷ but, in the dedication of his translation of *De morte* of pseudo-Xenocrates to Piero de' Medici, Ficino mentions that the only Latin academy of the six established to interpret Plato's thought after his death was that of Plotinus. Ficino's early understanding of Plato was filtered through an Augustine whose philosophical thought was heavily impregnated with Plotinian ideas.

Between Petrarch's death in 1374 and Ficino's recruitment into Cosimo's service, Florence had seen the appointments and the deaths of the three great chancellors, Salutati, Bruni, and Marsuppini, who had carried on the work of Petrarch in disinterring and disseminating a series of new liberal and humane personal and social attitudes which they derived from authors of pagan antiquity. After the death of the Aristotelian Marsuppini in 1453, Poggio became chancellor, but the task of promoting the humanizing values was taken over by professors at the *Studio*, Argyropoulos for Greek from 1456, and Landino for rhetoric and poetry in 1458.

The movement reflecting and promoting the new sense of human dignity which was already seeking to put down roots in Plato and Augustine and gradually rendering obsolescent specifically medieval ideals of asceticism and the spirituality of sexual suppression was also being furthered by Nicholas V, the pope appointed at the instiga-

⁶ Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, pp. 197-200 and 703. Marcel reprints the *Vita* by Corsi as well as the *Vita secunda*.

⁷ See Robert J. O'Connell, *Saint Augustine's Early Theory of Man*, Cambridge, Mass., 1968, and *Saint Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul*, Cambridge, Mass., 1969.

tion of the emperor, Frederick III, and by Alfonso of Aragon. Fazio's treatises, *De vitae felicitate* of 1446 and *De excellentia et praestantia hominis* of 1450 were dedicated respectively to the emperor and the pope, and it was at Alfonso's request that Manetti, who had discussed in Florence the salvation of unbaptized infants with Donato Acciaiuoli, composed his work *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* in 1452. At Florence, Landino himself was going to write the series of dialogues which included *De nobilitate animae* and *De vera nobilitate* alongside the *Disputationes Camaldulenses*.

Cosimo and Landino both reacted to Ficino's *Institutiones Platonicae* in 1456 by suggesting that he learn Greek to read Plato's text in the original. In that year Ficino had already copied the commentary of Chalcidius on the *Timaeus*, and by 1457 he had begun to write his own, as well as a clearly Platonizing *De furore divino*. He appears to have come to Plato through Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* while still studying at the Florentine *Studio* under the Aristotelian professor of philosophy and medicine, Nicolò di Jacopo Tignosi, and in spite of the still dominant Aristotelianism of the *Studio*. Ficino states in the 1458 *Tractatus di Dio e anima*⁸ that the *Institutiones*, following Hermes and Plato, were partly concerned with the immortality of the soul, the cardinal point of Ficino's later apologetic.

In the *Theologia Platonica* (VII.5, and elsewhere), Ficino relies on both Augustine's early *De immortalitate animae* and Plotinus (*Enneads*, IV.7) in the context of establishing the soul's immateriality, Plotinus's essential contribution to early Christian theology. Early Christian apologists had, under Stoic influence, been prepared to accept the materiality of the soul. Augustine's defence of immortality depended on the immateriality of the soul argued by Plotinus, so that the link between Plato, Plotinus, Augustine, and the soul's immateriality as a foundation for its immortality may have been formed in Ficino's mind at the very beginning of his literary activity. As it later unfolded, it was to reveal itself as the kernel of his thought.

Ficino's initial attraction to Plato coincided with that of Cosimo. In neither did it entail hostility to Aristotle, but it did lead in 1462, two years before Cosimo's death, to the establishment of the Florentine academy over which Ficino was to preside. The academy was more than a forum for study, and it is disputed whether membership

⁸ This text was published by P. O. Kristeller in *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2 vols, Florence, 1937, II, p. 146. See Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, pp. 200-01.

demanded commitment to a Platonic fellowship, a life-style which included a dedication to elevated standards of behaviour. It may have grown out of the handful of select reunions in which discussion ranged more widely than at the *Studio*, and tended for preference to explore the works of Augustine and Plato's dialogues in Bruni's translation.⁹

By Cosimo's death, Ficino had translated ten of Plato's dialogues as well as other 'Platonic works'. By 1 April 1466, a letter to Mercati tells us that he was on the twenty-fourth dialogue.¹⁰ By the death of Piero de' Medici in 1469, Ficino appears to have delivered in public commentaries on the *Philebus* and on Plotinus, drawing attention in the letter sub-titled *Philosophia platonica tamquam sacra legenda est in sacris* to the special suitability of the locale, the church of S. Maria degli Angeli. Whatever inhibitions Ficino may have felt as the result of an intervention by his bishop or his father, and whether or not we take at face value the anti-Platonist fra Zanobi Acciaiuoli's later and highly suspect assertion that Ficino had on his own admission been saved from heresy by the injunction of Archbishop Antonino Pierozzi, the future St Antoninus, that he should read Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles* before commenting on Plato, it is clear that by the date of Cosimo's death Ficino had in his own mind reconciled Platonic thought and Christian theology.¹¹

The series of Plato translations continued to be polished and corrected, but was otherwise interrupted for more than ten years from 1466. During that time, Ficino wrote the most famous of all his works, *De amore*, masquerading as a commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, whose full title was *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore*, the first commentary on *Philebus*, *De Christiana religione*, and the *Theologia Platonica de animorum immortalitate*. A speculative reconstruction of what went on in his mind has been undertaken by Raymond Marcel in his biography.

⁹ Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, pp. 281–86. Further views on the nature and development of the Academy are to be found in Arthur Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence*, Princeton, 1988, and several articles by James Hankins, most notably 'The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 44 (1991), pp. 429–75. See also Field's contribution in this volume.

¹⁰ Ficino was working on the *Cratylus*, which was actually to count as twenty-third out of thirty-six.

¹¹ On Zanobi's assertion that St Antoninus, a disciple of Giovanni Dominici, author of the *Lucula noctis* and a severe opponent of pagan authors, cautioned Ficino against Plato and enjoined on him the study of Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles*, see Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, pp. 204–12. Whole sections of the *Lucula noctis* are incorporated into Antoninus's own *Summa moralis*.

It can be said only that it is at least possible that it was at this point in Ficino's life that Plato's doctrine of the immateriality of the soul, as transmitted by Plotinus, came together with Plotinus's teaching about the degrees of being to create the apologetic in which Ficino recognized what was to be his life's work. The doctrine of Ficino's early *De voluptate* had been practically Stoic. The deepening familiarity with Plato had changed Ficino's attitude to human nature, forcing him to bypass the sharp scholastic distinction between nature and supernature in favour of a continuity of human experience, including pagan experience, allowing the ascent from the earthly love of a human creature to the love constitutive of the beatifying union with God.

That doctrine, however tentatively explored in the convoluted conventions of the *De amore* orations, lies at the heart of that work, and allows it to be understood as a foreword to the *Theologia Platonica*. The *Theologia*, under the cover of Augustine's authority, sweeps away the notion that the immaterial soul was the unique substantial form of the body, a doctrine not defined until 1513 and, although defended by Aquinas, considered by most medieval scholastics heretically irreconcilable with the immortality of the soul. With the constellation of *De amore* of 1469, the first version of the *Philebus* commentary,¹² the *Theologia Platonica*, certainly finished by 1474, and *De Christiana religione* of 1474, Ficino's great themes come together. He had in particular finally solved the problem of establishing the divinity and the immortality of the soul over which, as he wrote to Bandini, he had agonized for ten years. He had been able, thanks to Priscian's commentary on Theophrastus, to reconcile Aristotle's path to learning with Plato's guide to beatitude, thereby apparently respecting Aquinas as well as Augustine.¹³

Ficino had been ordained priest in 1473 in a gesture confirming his commitment to what he considered his divine mission. He had

¹² See Marsilio Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. and tr. by M. J. B. Allen, Berkeley, 1975, pp. 48–56.

¹³ See the *catena* of quotations from Ficino in Marcel's introduction to his critical edition of *De amore* (M. Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, ed. and tr. by R. Marcel, Paris, 1956), pp. 17–20. Cf. Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basel, 1576; repr. Turin, 1959 etc., p. 660, for the letter to Bandini; pp. 866–67 and 952 for the concordance of Moses and Plato, and Plato and Aristotle; and a letter to Pico and the first chapter of the *Timaeus* commentary for the differences between them, pp. 858 and 1438. See also Monfasani's paper in this volume.

avoided the threefold scholastic impasse. By refusing, like Plato and Augustine, to make human spiritual activity dependent on perception, and by identifying the active and passive intellects of the Arab commentators on Aristotle, he avoided discussions about the unicity of substantial form in human beings. By making the divine will non-contingent, he made it both natural and free, so avoiding the scholastic way of distinguishing the divine intellect from the divine will and the need to assign any distinction among divine acts or any need to discuss predestination. By upgrading human natural potential, he could insist that man's ascent to participation in the life of the divinity was the gift of God without either Pelagian implications or any compromise about human freedom of choice. The corollary of pagan salvation was something he was prepared to accept, even if only after considerable hesitation, and encouraged by Bruni's example.¹⁴

It was Plethon, who had died in 1452, the year before the fall of Constantinople, who developed the view that Platonism was the most suitable vehicle for underpinning Christian theology. Piero de' Medici died on 2 December 1469, and after two days' deliberation the republic's senior citizens invited his sons, the twenty-one-year old Lorenzo and his younger brother Giuliano, to take charge of the city. When late in 1469 Ficino received *In calumniatorem Platonis*, the defence of Plato by Plethon's former student Cardinal Bessarion, he had just finished *De amore* and the *Philebus* commentary and was about to start on the *Theologia Platonica*.

De amore purports to reproduce speeches modelled on those of Plato's *Symposium* and given at a banquet to celebrate the date of Plato's birth and death. Its heavy stylization betrays its exceedingly tentative views, but its content is radical. It is only probable that there was a real banquet in November 1458. The views expressed in the various orations cannot necessarily be regarded as Ficino's, or as belonging to those into whose mouths they are put, or as an

¹⁴ See the important article by Raymond Marcel, "'Saint" Socrate, patron de l'humanisme', *Revue internationale de philosophie*, 5 (1951), pp. 135-43; also M. J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Florence, 1998, ch. 4, 'Socrates and the daemonic voice of conscience'. The example of Socrates above other antique teachers of ethics, made clear in Ficino's letter to Paolo Ferobanti entitled *Confirmatio Christianorum per Socratica* (*Opera omnia*, p. 868; Allen, *Synoptic Art*, App. 1), was taken from Bessarion's *In calumniatorem Platonis*, printed at Rome in 1469. In the letter to Braccio Martelli, *Concordia Mosis et Platonis* (*Opera omnia*, pp. 866-67), Ficino quotes Clement of Alexandria (via Eusebius and Numenius) as saying that he recognized Moses in Plato, 'another Moses who spoke Greek'.

attempt to interpret Plato's text. They add up to nothing less than the rehabilitation of elevated forms of human experience, like love, founded in an emotional union between human beings which is not exclusive of physical relationships, as the first step in a continuous experience which can and should culminate in the ecstatic and beatifying love of God.

If the treatises on human dignity countered the gloomy asceticism that insisted on the miseries of human life and the medieval contempt for worldly joys, *De amore* rapturously undermines the insistence of medieval spiritualities on celibacy, insinuating, most particularly in the final chapters of the sixth 'Oratio', that instinct can be a guide to virtue. Its literary resonance was huge, but Ficino's admirers, even Castiglione and Leone Ebreo, to say nothing of Colet, did not dare to reaffirm the possibility that physical sexual relationships, even marital, might lead to, or even be compatible with, the love of God. In France, for instance, where cultural values became Stoic during the religious wars, such a view had to wait for the optimism of the early seventeenth century, for d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* and for François de Sales, who also based on Augustine his radical assertion of a natural instinct to love God.

In *De amore*, Ficino scarcely mentions Augustine, no doubt relying almost uniquely on Plato for the general aspiration of the human soul to find its fulfilment in divinization. *De amore*, however, clearly implies in pagans the same God-given aspirations as are present in Christians. The background presence of Augustine is, on the other hand, overwhelming in the *Theologia Platonica*. That must be due to the encouragement and the opportunities to shelter behind the weight of Augustine's authority afforded by the recently received *In calumniatorem* and its exploitation of Augustine in the interests of a Christian understanding of Plato.

Bessarion, violently provoked by George of Trebizond, but without losing his respect for Aristotle, took up the defence of Plato as more compatible with Christianity, without maintaining that Plato was a Christian. Bessarion endorses Augustine's hyperbolic praise of Plato as 'sanctissimus'. He points out how much Augustine relied on Plato, and refers to Book VIII of *De civitate Dei*, where Augustine famously suggested that Plato had become acquainted with the prophetic works of the Old Testament during his journey to Egypt, and had drawn on the opening of Genesis for his account of the creation in the *Timaeus*. Bessarion goes further than Augustine, quoting

Cyril on the studies of Pythagoras and Plato in Egypt, where the name of Moses was still held in veneration.¹⁵ Ficino goes further still, ending *De Christiana religione* with the words 'The Platonists used the divine illumination of Christians to interpret the divine Plato.'¹⁶

Ficino can now proclaim that he is relying on the guidance of Augustine for Platonic theology, a statement he notably makes in the preface to the *Theologia Platonica*, the preface to the Plotinus commentary, and in a letter to Giovanni Niccolini, Archbishop of Amalfi, in which he refers to Augustine's statement that there are two ways to truth: authority, to be found in Christ alone, and reason, to be found only in the Platonists.¹⁷ Ficino's inspiration was more religious than what today we call 'humanist'. He noticed, but was not greatly excited by the way in which his 'golden century' had brought back into the light the 'liberal disciplines', grammar, poetry, oratory, the visual arts, architecture, music, and 'the ancient chant of the Orphic lyre', and has even mistakenly been seen as a moralist whose spirituality links that of St Antoninus to Savonarola's.¹⁸

Depending on what view one takes of the Renaissance, and the part played in it by the cult of classical antiquity, Ficino was either its key figure or irrelevant to it. He was concerned with the revival of interest in ancient languages, literature, literary style, and culture only in so far as they helped him to establish the philosophical basis for Christianity, the primordial assumption for which was the immortality of the soul. The survival of the individual after death had been compromised by the Averroistic and Alexandrian interpretations of Aristotle, as Ficino says in the preface to the Plotinus commentary, but it had also been threatened by the philosophical component of Aristotelian scholasticism, whatever view was held about the unicity

¹⁵ See the edition of *In calumniatorem Platonis* by L. Mohler in the second volume of his *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsmann*, 3 vols, Paderborn, 1923-42, esp. I.3.2, pp. 25 and 27, and III.8.2, p. 245.

¹⁶ On the variations in the lines of transmission invented to explain the inheritance of Mosaic doctrine by Plato, see Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, p. 611 ff., and Allen, *Synoptic Art*, chs 1 and 2.

¹⁷ For the deference paid by Ficino to Augustine, see Tarabochia Canavero, 'S. Agostino nella *Teologia Platonica*', esp. p. 644, and the treatment by Marcel of Ficino's reliance on Augustine in *Marsile Ficin*, p. 602 ff. In the letter to Niccolini, accompanying a copy of the *Theologia Platonica* (*Opera omnia*, p. 855), Ficino points out how little Augustine thought needed to be changed in the Platonists to make them Christians. For a rather different view, see Allen, *Synoptic Art*, ch. 2.

¹⁸ See the letter to Paul of Middelburg (*Opera omnia*, p. 944) and Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, p. 588.

of substantial form in human beings. Ficino cannot really be understood without an appreciation of the philosophically disastrous and theologically heretical categories adopted from antiquity through Islam by the Parisian scholastics. Once human beings were described in terms of soul and body, intellect and will, natural and supernatural powers, it was bound to be possible to show how any philosophically coherent theology would lead to heresy, and it was bound to become impossible to construct a theology capable of supporting Christian religious commitment and the church's devotional traditions.

The doctrine of the Trinity had been the result of an early accommodation between Hebrew monotheism and Platonic ideas. In the Middle Ages it became impossible convincingly to steer Trinitarian theology simultaneously away from the Scylla of tritheism and the Charybdis of a triple incarnation. Immortality became much easier to defend within what we regard as the Neoplatonic tradition. That tradition could shelter behind the authority of Augustine, but, since all human beings shared the same aspirations which were triggered by human emotional experience to ascend to the beatifying love of God, it necessarily implied both the immateriality of the principle of human spiritual activity and the possibility of pagan salvation.

In spite of the Aristotelianism of the thirteenth-century scholastics and of Nicholas V, Ficino tells us that he believed himself divinely inspired to present to his contemporaries the philosophies of Plato and Plotinus, themselves beneficiaries of a tradition which was inaugurated with the beginnings of the human race. The transmission, first recounted by Ficino in the 1463 translation of the *Poimandres*, comprised Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras, and Plato's teacher Philolaus. Raymond Marcel counts eleven occurrences of this list.¹⁹ Zoroaster is first mentioned by Ficino in *De amore*, but actually put at the head of the list before Hermes in the *Philebus* commentary, and then again in the *Platonic Theology*; and there is more than a suggestion that Ficino recognized the common origin of the three great Middle Eastern religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The geography of their origins strongly suggests a common Zoroastrian ancestry.²⁰

Ficino believes that Hermes Trismegistus started to teach by praying, and ended by sacrifice, and he accepted Plato's view that

¹⁹ *Marsile Ficin*, p. 603.

²⁰ Allen, *Synoptic Art*, pp. 26-41.

Zoroaster's philosophy is nothing but 'sapiens pietas cultusque divinus'.²¹ Ficino follows Augustine in never allowing to the philosophers and spiritual teachers before Christ the fullness of Christian truth which Christ first revealed, and is generally careful not to say outright that Plato is actually saved, however richly he deserved the status of Christian prophet. Indeed, however near Ficino thought Plato came to the fullness of Christian truth, and however much Augustine's conversion to Christianity owes to his reading of Plato,²² Plato did not arrive at the doctrines of the Trinity or the incarnation, as Ficino makes clear in his letter to Rondoni, Bishop of Rimini, repeating what he had already written in the *Concordia*.²³ Ficino treats the question of the salvation of the pre-Christian theologians in the preface to the second edition of *De Christiana religione* and in a letter to Antonio da Sarzana, *De salute philosophorum ante Christi adventum* (*Opera omnia*, p. 806). They are clearly not damned, but they cannot merit the supernatural grace of Christ. Their final salvation is allowed only when, with the Old Testament prophets, they gain admission to heaven in the presence of Christ.

The solution is metaphysically unsatisfactory, particularly for a thinker like Ficino, who subscribes to a hierarchically separated series of levels of being. Any form of limbo, even if it avoids the crasser sufferings with which Pseudo-Gregory terrified a millennium of Christians, causes the frustration of the natural human aspirations to supernatural beatitude in which hell was considered ultimately to consist. Yet without its supernatural aspirations, human nature could neither yearn for nor be fulfilled by divinizing beatitude.

Ficino, although taken by modern commentators to be a theologian in the strict sense, should actually be regarded as an apologist rather than a metaphysician. He found the answers to the central religious problem of personal immortality in a Platonic, or more generally Plotinian view of the soul, as Augustine had done. He assumed the primordially of the religion of Hermes Trismegistus, as expressed

²¹ See letter to Antonius Ziliolus Sophronicus, *Opera omnia*, p. 853, quoted by Marcel, *Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 624–25, and in English translation in *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, 6 vols to date, London, 1975–, VI, pp. 32–34.

²² See *De Christiana religione*, ch. 22.

²³ M. J. B. Allen, 'Marsilio Ficino on Plato, the Neoplatonists and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 37 (1984), pp. 555–84, now in his *Plato's Third Eye: Studies in Marsilio Ficino's Metaphysics and its Sources*, Aldershot, 1995.

in what we call the *Corpus Hermeticum* and he knew as the *Poimandres*, and the authenticity of the Neoplatonist *Corpus Dionysiacum* as the work of St Paul's first convert at Athens. He was thereby helped by being able to affirm the homogeneity of the Mosaic revelation, the *Timaeus*, and the world-view of Plotinus.

He eagerly sheltered under the unassailable authority of Augustine, particularly the early Augustine, and found ingenious ways of re-affirming a pre-Christian historical tradition which allowed him to envisage the authenticity of pagan virtue. He expanded Christian orthodoxy, but was more in danger for his views on astral influences over human behaviour than for his obvious distaste for the doctrine of original sin. In the end, Ficino's great contribution to the history of Western culture is the view of human nature's potential tentatively implied throughout *De amore*.

Once the synthesis of the Mosaic revelation, the *Timaeus* and Plotinus had been achieved, the expansion of Christian orthodoxy could be promoted through the successful importation into Christian apologetic of an upgraded view of human moral and spiritual potential. Instinct might serve as a guide to virtue, and purely human love might lead human beings back towards the God who created them, loved them, and love of whom would finally fulfil them. If a need to revalue the moral dignity of human nature lies at the heart of the European Renaissance, Ficino is undoubtedly its greatest philosopher, the author of a blueprint for a Christian anthropology which, in addition to its overwhelming immediate success, would continue to dominate western European culture for three centuries.

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ECHOES OF EGYPT IN HERMES AND FICINO

Clement Salaman

Ficino writes in his book *On the Christian Religion*: 'Divine Providence never allows any part of the world to be completely devoid of religion',¹ affirming that some knowledge of God and the desire to worship Him were with all peoples and in all places from the very beginning. He originally thought that sacred knowledge had been most fully developed in Egypt where it had been passed down from master to disciple as a holy tradition. He writes that Hermes Trismegistus (Hermes the thrice greatest) was 'the first father of Theology' and was

followed by Orpheus, who occupied the second place in the ancient theology. Aglaophemus was initiated into the sacred mysteries by Orpheus, to be succeeded in theology by Pythagoras, who in turn was followed by Philolaus, the teacher of our divine Plato.²

Hermes had been identified by the ancient Greeks with the ibis-headed Egyptian god Thoth and is mentioned by classical, early Jewish and early Christian authors. The most important works attributed to him were the *Asclepius* and the *Poimandres* (or *Pimander*), the latter a collection of treatises now known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*. In the Renaissance, the *Asclepius* was available in the fourth-century Latin translation attributed to Apuleius, but the *Poimandres*, the contents of which were known to the third-century Church Father Lactantius, had disappeared.³ Interest in Florence was therefore intense when a copy in Greek of fourteen books of this collection was discovered around 1460 in Macedonia by Leonardo of Pistoia,⁴ and

¹ Marsilio Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basle, 1576; repr. Turin, 1959 etc., p. 4.

² Preface to Ficino's Latin translation of *Pimander*, *Opera omnia*, p. 1836.

³ For references to the *Corpus Hermeticum* in Lactantius, see Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Chicago and London, 1964, p. 7.

⁴ Leonardo of Pistoia was a monk who acted as one of many agents employed by Cosimo de' Medici to collect manuscripts for him. For further discussion of this MS, see Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, p. 12, and P. O. Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, 4 vols, Rome, 1956-96, I, p. 223.

acquired by Cosimo de' Medici, who in 1463 had installed the young Marsilio Ficino in a house near his own villa in Careggi to translate all the works of Plato. But now something had appeared that was even more important than Plato,⁵ indeed, was the source, apparently, for much of the wisdom of Plato: the supremacy of *to agathon* (the good), the divinity of the human soul, the power of the word, and much more. Had not Plato, according to Diogenes Laertius, spent five years in Egypt studying this wisdom?⁶ In 1463 Ficino completed the translation of the *Poimandres*, a title which he gave to the whole work, although in the original it is the title only of the first book. It was to become a major source in Ficino's own writings, for he believed that Hermes was not only the spring of Greek philosophy but also shared the Egypto-Judaic knowledge of Moses.

According to St Augustine there were two Hermes, the younger a grandson of an earlier Hermes who was a contemporary of Moses. This elder Hermes had become a god and was supposed to have been the real author of the Hermetic works, of which the younger Hermes was the translator.⁷ The second-century BC writer Artapanus had considered Hermes and Moses to be one and the same person; a view which Ficino almost seems to countenance.⁸ For a time, after the publication of Ficino's translation in 1471, Ficino's view of Hermes's authority became generally accepted.

By 1469 Ficino had substituted Zoroaster as the first source of the

⁵ Ficino, preface to his translation of Plotinus, *Opera omnia*, p. 1537.

⁶ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, ed. and tr. by R. D. Hicks, 2 vols, London, 1972, III.6 (Life of Plato), I, pp. 281–83.

⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, VIII.26 and XVIII.8. Although Augustine discusses the writings of Hermes in some detail, he cautions his reader against Hermes's views. Brian Copenhaver quotes a letter wrongly attributed to Manetho by the Byzantine George Syncellus. The letter is addressed to Ptolemy II Philadelphus (282–229 BC). The quotation concludes, 'I shall present to you the sacred books that I have learnt about, written by your ancestor, Hermes Trismegistus . . .' Syncellus adds, 'This is what he says about the translation of the books written by the second Hermes.' See Brian Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek 'Corpus Hermeticum' and the Latin 'Asclepius' in a New English Translation*, Cambridge, 1992, p. xv.

⁸ Sebastiano Gentile in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Ermete Trismegisto. Marsilio Ficino and the Return of Hermes Trismegistus*, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana exhibition catalogue, Florence, 1999, p. 31. Gentile quotes Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*, XV.10, in *Opera omnia*, p. 400. See also M. J. B. Allen, 'Marsilio Ficino, Hermes Trismegistus and the *Corpus Hermeticum*', in *New Perspectives on Renaissance Thought. Essays in the History of Science, Education and Philosophy in Memory of C. B. Schmitt*, ed. by John Henry and Sarah Hutton, London, 1990, pp. 38–47, repr. in idem, *Plato's Third Eye*, Aldershot, 1995, art. XII.

philosophic tradition but in a letter of 1485 to Janus Pannonius in Hungary, Hermes is apparently accorded equal antiquity and this precedence is repeated in Ficino's preface to his Plotinus in 1492.⁹ But this view of Ficino's was attacked by the Calvinist Isaac Casaubon in the late sixteenth century.¹⁰ Mainly by examining the language used, he showed that the Hermetic texts were composed after the beginning of the Christian era. The boot was now on the other foot. Instead of Hermes being the source of Plato, it now appeared that Plato, along with other Greek, Jewish and Christian writings, was the source of the Hermetic texts.

In fact, it is now generally agreed that the Greek text of the *Corpus Hermeticum* was written during the first two or three centuries of the Christian era in Alexandria. The views of scholars and editors, both before and after Casaubon, on the provenance of the influences on the philosophic Hermetic literature are admirably summarized by Brian Copenhaver in the introduction to his translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and *Asclepius*.¹¹ In 1904, Richard Reitzenstein published *Poimandres: Studien zur griechisch-ägyptischen und frühchristlichen Literatur*, in which he maintained that the fundamental religious influence was Egyptian and that the *Hermetica* were used as texts in religious communities in Egypt. In 1921, Reitzenstein substituted an Iranian for an Egyptian basis for the *Hermetica*. However, Walter Scott, in his English edition first published in 1924, reaffirms the fundamentally Greek origin of the *Hermetica*, although he rejects Casaubon's assertion that there was any significant Christian or Jewish input.¹² Scott allows a possible exception in Book XIII of the *Corpus*, which deals with the subject of rebirth. Scott's view is that the preponderant influence on the *Hermetica* is Plato, above all in the *Timaeus*, where he presumably has in mind especially the account of Creation in

⁹ Ficino writes in the preface to his translation of Plotinus, 'factum est, ut pia quaedam philosophia quondam et apud Persas sub Zoroastre et apud Aegyptios sub Mercurio nasceretur', *Opera omnia*, p. 1537. Michael Allen argues powerfully that Ficino still intended a primacy for Zoroaster and this is illustrated by the fact that Zoroaster is mentioned first in the passage quoted above; see M. J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Florence, 1998, pp. 26–31.

¹⁰ For a brief discussion of Casaubon's work, *De rebus sacris et ecclesiasticis exercitationes XVI*, see Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, pp. 398–403.

¹¹ Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, pp. xlv–lix.

¹² *Hermetica*, ed. by Walter Scott, 4 vols, Oxford, 1924–36; repr. Boston, 1993, I, pp. 8–15.

Book I of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. He goes so far as to say that the influence of Plato 'is manifest in almost every page'.¹³ Scott also considered that the influence of Plato was felt indirectly through Posidonius, the Stoic philosopher writing between 100 and 50 BC. Stoic influence on the *Corpus* through Posidonius is also noticed by Gilles Quispel.¹⁴

Although Scott thought that there was very little Egyptian influence on the content of the *Hermetica*, 'it may have affected the spirit or temper of the writers', of whom he thought some, certainly, 'and probably almost all, [were] Egyptians by race, though Greek by education; and there is in some of their writings a fervour and intensity of religious emotion, culminating in a sense of complete union with God, or absorption in God, such as is hardly to be found in Greek philosophic writings, until we come down to Plotinus, who was himself an Egyptian by birth and bringing up'.¹⁵ The most comprehensive critical edition of the *Corpus* and *Asclepius* was that published by A. D. Nock and A.-J. Festugière in 1945 onwards. In his preface, Nock broadly echoes the views of Scott on the main sources of the *Hermetica*:

Sauf le cadre, ils contiennent extrêmement peu d'éléments égyptiens. Les idées sont celles de la pensée philosophique grecque populaire, sous une forme très éclectique, avec ce mélange de platonisme, d'aristotélisme et de stoïcisme alors si répandu. Ça et là paraissent des traces de judaïsme et, probablement aussi, d'une littérature religieuse dont la source ultime est l'Iran: par contre, nulle marque évident ni de christianisme ni de néoplatonisme.¹⁶

However, in the second part of the twentieth century considerably more importance has been attributed to other sources for the content of the *Hermetica*. As Copenhaver mentions, even as early as 1935, C. H. Dodd's work, *The Bible and the Greeks*, devoted much time to finding traces of the Septuagint in the *Hermetica*.¹⁷ Much more recently, speaking of the time when the *Corpus Hermeticum* was written down in Greek, Gilles Quispel writes in his preface to *The Way of Hermes*:

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

¹⁴ Gilles Quispel, preface to *Corpus Hermeticum*, tr. by C. Salaman, D. Van Oyen, W. Wharton in *The Way of Hermes*, London, 1999, p. 10. All quotations from the *Corpus Hermeticum* hereafter are taken from this translation.

¹⁵ *Hermetica*, ed. Scott, p. 11.

¹⁶ *Corpus Hermeticum*, ed. by A. D. Nock, French tr. by A.-J. Festugière, 4 vols, Paris, 1945–54; repr. Paris, 1991, I, p. v.

¹⁷ Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, p. vii.

There existed at that time in Alexandria and Palestine a 'Throne Mysticism' in which the initiated rose through the seven palaces of Heaven to behold the *Kabod*, the luminous glory of God in the shape of a Man. This mysticism was inspired by the vision of Ezekiel I . . . In the *Poimandres*, God brings forth the *Anthropos*, Man, who descends to create and falls into matter. That echoes the main theme of esoteric Judaism.¹⁸

Copenhaver draws attention to the work done since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices in 1945 to 'reassert an Egyptian ancestry' for the *Hermetica*, and mentions the work of Doresse, Krause, Daumas, Derchain, Sauneron, Ray and Rees. He also gives special emphasis to the work of J.-P. Mahé.¹⁹ Mahé himself points out that the *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius*, mainly preserved in an Armenian translation, antedate most of the Hermetic philosophical writings and that some of the aphorisms in the *Definitions* seem to have been known to the author of *Poimandres*. He considers that the *Definitions* were a collection of spiritual exercises which were later worked into more literary form in subsequent Hermetic philosophical literature.²⁰ Mahé considered this aphoristic form of spiritual instruction to be a tradition from Pharaonic Egypt. He writes,

Les traditions scolaires de l'Égypte pharaonique avaient en effet donné lieu à un genre littéraire très comparable, celui de la sagesse, collection de brefs enseignements adressés, comme nos sentences hermétiques, parfois avec l'ébauche d'un dialogue, par un père à son fils.²¹

The main purpose of this article is to identify some concepts in Egyptian sources which reappear in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and then again in the works of Ficino, especially in his correspondence, in his commentary on Plato's *Symposium (De amore)* and in his *Three Books on Life (De vita libri tres)*. Such reappearances do not prove a direct connection but they suggest that the author(s) of the *Corpus* were aware of at least some of these strands in Egyptian thought, and more importantly for us here, they do show how much Ficino was indebted to the *Corpus*.

Peter Kingsley has drawn attention to the etymology of the title

¹⁸ G. Quispel, in *The Way of Hermes*, p. 10.

¹⁹ Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, pp. lvi-lviii.

²⁰ Jean-Pierre Mahé, introduction to *The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius*, in *The Way of Hermes*, pp. 101-06.

²¹ Jean-Pierre Mahé, *Hermès en Haute-Egypte: les textes hermétiques de Nag Hammadi et leurs parallèles grecs et latins*, 2 vols, Québec, 1978-82, II, pp. 38-39.

of the first book in the Corpus, the *Poimandres*: *p-eime nte-rē*, which in Egyptian means ‘the understanding of Re’, that is, of the Supreme. As Kingsley points out, that is exactly how Poimandres, the teacher of Hermes, describes himself in Book I. ‘I am the *Nous* (understanding) of the Supreme.’²² If this is so, we need to ask what concept the Egyptians had of the Supreme. Jeremy Naydler writes in his book *Temple of the Cosmos*: ‘There can be no question of the ultimate supremacy of the sun. It is the sun that is the source of life and emblem of the creative spirit that permeates the whole world. From the earliest times hymns were addressed to the sun god Ra.’ Naydler then quotes from the 18th-Dynasty *Short Hymn to Aten*:

Splendid you rise, O living sun, eternal Lord!
 You are radiant, beautiful, mighty,
 Your love is great, immense.
 Your rays light up all faces.
 Your bright hue gives life to hearts,
 When you fill the two lands with your love.

Mighty God, who created himself,
 Who made every land, created what is in it,
 All peoples, herds and flocks,
 All trees that grow from the soil,
 They live when you dawn for them,
 You are mother and father of all you made.

When you dawn, their eyes observe you,
 As your rays light the whole earth;
 Every heart acclaim your sight,
 When you are risen as their lord.²³

Spell 15 from *The Book of the Dead* is in places very similar in tone. It opens with these words:

Hail to you, O Re, at your rising, O Atum-Horakhty!

Your beauty is worshipped in my eyes when the sunshine comes into being over my breast . . .

All your foes are overthrown, the Unwearying Stars acclaim you, the Imperishable Stars worship you when you set in the horizon of Manu, being happy at all times, and living and enduring as my lord.

²² Peter Kingsley, ‘Poimandres: The Etymology of the Name and the Origins of the Hermetica’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 56 (1993), pp. 1–24. See also *Corpus Hermeticum*, I.2.

²³ Jeremy Naydler, *Temple of the Cosmos: The Ancient Egyptian Experience of the Sacred*, Rochester, Vt., 1995, p. 2.

Hail to you, O Re, when you rise and Atum when you set. How beautiful are your rising and your shining on the back of your mother Nut, you having appeared as King of the Gods. The Lower Sky has greeted you, Justice embraces you at all times. . . .

The voice goes forth, and the earth is inundated with silence, for the Sole One came into existence in the sky before the plains and the mountains existed. The Herdsman, the Sole Lord, who made whatever exists, he has fashioned the tongue of the Ennead. O you who took what is in the waters, you issue thence on to the bank of the Lake of Horus. I breathe the air which comes out of your nose. . . .²⁴

The author of the first hymn seems to be referring not only to the light of the visible sun, but to its emanation from Atum, the creative principle, for the sun fills the two lands with his love. The sun in this sense is the

Mighty God, who created Himself,
Who made every land, created what is in it.²⁵

This dual nature of the sun is also implied in Spell 15, 'Hail to you, O Re, when you rise and Atum when you set.' It is Re/Atum by whom the earth is 'inundated with silence'. He is 'the Sole One who came into existence in the sky before the plains and mountains existed. . . .'

In Plato, Socrates gives the visible sun only as an analogy of the intelligible sun.²⁶ But the dual nature of the actual sun appears again more distinctly in Hermes:

The sun bestows on the immortals their everlasting life and he nourishes the eternal regions of the cosmos with the ascending light sent forth from the side that faces heaven; with the descending light that illumines the entire hollow realm of water, earth and air, he enlivens and sets in motion birth and death.²⁷

This is difficult ground for Ficino to follow in a fifteenth-century Christian context, but with suitable disclaimers he comes quite close to doing so. He ends a letter on *The Orphic Comparison of the Sun to God* in these terms:

For this reason, even if we are not prepared to admit the Orphic Mystery as true let us at least for now pretend that it is true, so that

²⁴ *The Book of the Dead*, tr. by R. D. Faulkner, Warminster, Wilts., 1973, p. 40.

²⁵ See the *Short Hymn to Aten* above.

²⁶ Plato, *Republic*, VI, 504D–505A, tr. by Desmond Lee, London, 1955.

²⁷ *Corpus Hermeticum*, XVI.8.

by looking up at the celestial Sun in this way we may descry in it, as in a mirror, that super-celestial One who has set His tabernacle in the Sun.²⁸

In this spiritual aspect, the sun is unique, and this is emphasized in the spell as the 'Sole One who came into existence in the sky before the plains and mountains existed. The Herdsman, the Sole Lord . . .' Echoing this uniqueness, Hermes tells Tat that those who partook in the gift of God regard time spent here as a misfortune. 'Disregarding the gross and the subtle, they hasten to the One alone.'²⁹ This expression 'to the One alone' was of particular interest to Jan Zandee, who pointed out that a very similar epithet in Egyptian is applied to Ammon-Re, which translates literally as 'The Only of the Only One'.³⁰ Ficino writes to Amerigo Corsini about this aspect of 'the One': 'Let us love the Good alone for its own sake, which alone is good of itself since by its infinite nature and power it is everywhere, it cannot be divided.'³¹

In the *Hymn to Aten* the Sun is regarded as having 'made every land, created what is in it'. In the Spell he has 'made whatever exists'. Yet there is another tradition in Egyptian thought going back to the Middle Kingdom in which the function of creation is not performed by the Supreme directly. Coffin Text 714 says: 'I was [the spirit in] the Primeval Waters, he who had no companion when my name came into existence.'³² Another version says,

I am he . . . whose speech was what had come forth from his heart, his cycle with Shu was the circling of Command and Intelligence, asking his advice; and Command and Intelligence said to him: 'Come, then, let us go and create the names of this coil according to what has come forth from his heart.'³³

²⁸ *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, 6 vols to date, London, 1975-, V, p. 44. In the final phrase, Ficino is uniting Hermetic and Christian doctrine by quoting from Psalm 19:4.

²⁹ *Corpus Hermeticum*, IV.5.

³⁰ Jan Zandee, 'Het Hermetisme en het Oude Egypte', in *De Hermetische Gnosis in de loop der eeuwen*, ed. by G. Quispel, Baarn, 1994, pp. 96-174, at p. 126, quoted in *The Way of Hermes*, p. 83.

³¹ *Letters*, VI, p. 51.

³² R. T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, London, 1959, pp. 74-75. Coffin Texts 714 and IV, 147 are quoted.

³³ *Ibid.* Coffin Text, III, 334j.

In these texts, the Supreme Spirit latent in the Primeval Waters is distinguished from his cycle with Shu, the 'circling of Command and Intelligence' which creates the names that bring what is named into differentiated existence. The term 'coil' is a reference to the fact that the primordial waters are sometimes represented as a serpent.

The separation of the function of creation from the Supreme God is not part of mainstream Judaeo-Christian theology. However, it is found in Plato and Plotinus. In Plato's *Timaeus* the Father leaves the creation of living things to the Gods.³⁴ In Plotinus 'the Intelligence proceeds from the Good and the Soul proceeds from the Intelligence';³⁵ but 'the Soul is the author of all living things'.³⁶ In Hermes, the distinction between the Creator and the One is far more pronounced:

I do not therefore say, Tat, that the One creates; for over a long time the creator is defective, in that sometimes he creates and sometimes he does not. Sometimes he is defective in quality and at other times in quantity. Sometimes he creates many different things of a particular kind and sometimes their opposite. But God, Father and the Supreme Good are there for the existence of all.³⁷

In his role as creator God possesses the features of both sexes. According to Zandee this aspect of God receives particular emphasis in Egyptian religion.³⁸ Some of the depictions of the Pharaoh Akhenaten (1350–1334 BC), the Son of Aten ('The Supreme'), seem deliberately to emphasize the androgynous quality of his 'father'.³⁹ The *Corpus Hermeticum* also is emphatic about this aspect of God. 'Nous, God, being male and female, beginning as life and light, gave birth, by the word, to another Nous, the creator of the world.'⁴⁰

Ficino is not able to describe God in this way. However, when he resorts to mythology he comes quite close to it. In his *De amore* he writes that:

³⁴ Plato, *Timaeus*, 41.

³⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.8, tr. by Elmer O'Brien in *The Essential Plotinus*, Indianapolis, 1964, p. 100.

³⁶ *Enneads*, V.2, *ibid.*, p. 92.

³⁷ *Corpus Hermeticum*, X.3.

³⁸ Papyrus Leiden, I, 344, verso II,1, cited in Zandee, 'Het Hermetisme', p. 120, quoted in *The Way of Hermes*, pp. 83–84.

³⁹ For a discussion of Akhenaten's curious shape and his quasi-divine status, see Peter A. Clayton, *Chronicle of the Pharaohs*, London, 1994, pp. 120–23.

⁴⁰ *Corpus Hermeticum*, I.9.

Platonists call the supreme God Uranus because just as heaven, that sublime body, rules over and contains all bodies, so that supreme God is exalted over all spirits. But the mind they call by several names. For they sometimes call it Saturn, sometimes Jupiter, sometimes Venus . . . Its being they were accustomed to call Saturn; its life, Jupiter; its intelligence, Venus. The World Soul also we call, in the same way, Saturn, Jupiter and Venus: insofar as it understands the celestial things, Saturn; insofar as it moves the heavenly things, Jupiter; insofar as it procreates lower things, Venus . . .

Finally, to speak briefly, Venus is twofold. One is certainly that intelligence which we have located in the Angelic Mind. The other is the power of procreation attributed to the World Soul . . . The former Venus first embraces the splendor of divinity (Uranus) in herself; then she transfers it to the second Venus. The latter Venus transfers sparks of that splendor into the Matter of the World.⁴¹

Before creation can begin, the first Venus (the intelligence in the Angelic Mind) has to embrace Uranus (the Supreme God) in herself. Thus the male and female principles come or rather are together in the Angelic Mind before movement and life can be imparted to the Cosmos, in other words, before creation can start.

Although in other passages of *De amore* Ficino seems to emphasize the orthodox Catholic view that God creates every part of his creation, the passage quoted above does seem to introduce another way of looking at this cosmogenesis. For the first Venus has to take the active step of embracing the splendour of divinity in herself, then she has to transfer it to the second Venus, which is 'the power of procreation in the world soul'. This apparently refers to the procreation of beauty since the second Venus then transfers 'sparks of that splendour' into the 'matter of the world'. But there are some difficulties in postulating the transference of beauty as distinct from the creation of form. It may be that Ficino meant that God's presence was an essential prerequisite for each step in creation but that creation took place by virtue of the presence of the ideal forms (an aspect of the Angelic World) at each step.

If God the Creator is the Universal Mind in which all things are brought into being, God is also the Universal Soul which inspires all living creatures with breath and life. This power is especially asso-

⁴¹ Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, tr. by Sears Jayne, 2nd edn, Dallas, Tex., 1985, pp. 53-54. See M. J. B. Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of his 'Phaedrus' Commentary, its Sources and Genesis*, Berkeley etc., 1984, ch. 5, esp. pp. 115-21, 130-32.

ciated with the sun. The *Hymn to Aten* reads, 'All peoples, herds and flocks, All trees that grow from the soil, They live when you dawn for them'. 'I breathe the air which comes out of your nose', says Spell 15. In *De vita* Ficino says that 'the World Soul which is active everywhere, unfolds in every place its power of universal life principally through the sun'.⁴² The word *anima* in Latin signifies breath as well as soul.⁴³ Hermes states that 'when the soul returns to itself, the breath withdraws into the blood and the soul into the breath'.⁴⁴ He again connects the sun with the soul and breath in Book XVI where he likens the sun to a charioteer: 'wearing the Cosmos as a crown he sits at the centre. Like a skilled driver he safely guides the chariot of the cosmos, binding the reins to himself, so that it does not run amok. His reins are life, soul, breath, immortality and generation.'⁴⁵

The One includes both the manifest and the unmanifest. God is unmanifest, but so also are the first mysterious steps of the creative process. For the enlightened man the unmanifest is manifest. Hermes says to Tat, 'Understand that what appears unmanifest to many will become most evident to you, for it would not exist if it were not manifest to you.' He goes on to say,

The unmanifest exists always. It does not need to appear for it exists always and it makes everything else manifest . . . It brings all images to the mind in imagination. Things that are begotten belong only to imagination. For imagination is nothing but begetting.⁴⁶

The connections between these passages and Neoplatonic teaching are clear. We have already seen that it is the Angelic Mind (the *Nous* in Plotinus) in which the archetypes or ideas of everything are created, though they themselves are unmanifest. Socrates and Ficino insist that sensory objects in the material world are but shadows or reflections of these archetypes, which alone are real. In a letter to Antonio Canigiani on music Ficino describes the steps by which music becomes fully manifest:

⁴² Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books of Life (De Vita)*, ed. and tr. by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark, Binghamton, NY, 1989, pp. 246–47. See also Ficino, *The Book of Life*, tr. by Charles Boer, Dallas, Tex., 1980, p. 89.

⁴³ Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford, 1969, p. 123.

⁴⁴ *Corpus Hermeticum*, X.16.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, XVI.7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, V.1.

The first music takes place in reason, the second in fantasy, the third in words; thence follows song and after that the movement of the fingers in sound; lastly the movement of the whole body in gymnastics or dancing. Thus we may see that the music of the soul is led by steps to all the limbs of the body.⁴⁷

The Egyptians too had some conception of an Unmanifest from which the manifest arises. Erik Iversen quotes the Papyrus Bremmen Rhind, where Re is described as being in the primeval ocean 'before the existence of heaven and earth' and 'before he had found a fixed place to stand' (i.e., for the act of creation). 'Numerous beings issued from his mouth' and he 'joined them in a state of inertia'.⁴⁸ Jan Zandee has noted that the sun god Ammon-Re remains hidden behind his physical appearance.⁴⁹ A New Kingdom (second millennium BC) hymn to the sun reads, 'Thou art higher than gods and men, thou shinest before us, but we do not know thy image. Thou showest thy face, but we do not know thy real being.' A number of other pertinent references to Egyptian concepts of the Unmanifest are given by Jeremy Naydler.⁵⁰

The beauty of the manifest is a direct link to the Unmanifest and attracts the individual back to God, source of all beauty. Both the *Hymn to Aten* and Spell 15 draw attention to this. The *Hymn* says to the Sun, 'As your rays light the whole earth; Every heart acclaim your sight.' The spell proclaims, 'Your beauty is worshipped in my eyes when the sunshine comes into being over my breast.' Hermes advocates the contemplation of the physical beauty of the cosmos as a means of coming to apprehend the unmanifest beauty of the divine. He exclaims:

O that you could grow wings and fly up into the air, and that, poised between earth and heaven, you might see the firmness of earth, the liquidity of the sea, the course of the rivers and the free flow of the air, the piercing fire, the revolution of the stars, the swiftness of the heavenly movement encircling all these things. What most blessed vision, O son, to behold all that in one moment; the unmoving being moved, the unmanifest being made manifest through what it creates! This is the very order of the universe and this is the beauty of the order.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *Letters*, I, p. 143.

⁴⁸ Erik Iversen, *Egyptian and Hermetic Doctrine*, Copenhagen, 1984, p. 17.

⁴⁹ Papyrus Berlin 3050, VIII, I, cited in Zandee, 'Het Hermetisme', p. 131, and quoted in *The Way of Hermes*, p. 82.

⁵⁰ Naydler, *Temple of the Cosmos*, pp. 24-39.

⁵¹ *Corpus Hermeticum*, V.5.

The sparks of beauty in the material world serve to remind the human being of his own origin. Ficino writes in a letter to Pellegrino degli Agli,

But we do indeed perceive the reflection of divine beauty with our eyes and mark the resonance of divine harmony with our ears—those bodily senses which Plato considers the most perceptive of all. Thus when the soul has received through the physical senses those images which are within material objects, we remember what we knew before, when we existed outside the prison of the body.

In the next paragraph he continues that those who 'first see form and grace in anyone' should 'rejoice, as at the reflection of divine beauty', for 'it is by a burning desire for this beauty that they may be drawn to the heavens'.⁵²

The virtues of the higher worlds could also be summoned to operate in the lower. In Egypt the powers of the god Osiris were in a sense withdrawn into the unmanifest with his departure from the earth. But these powers were made manifest again through the 'opening of his mouth' by his son Horus. Osiris once more became 'alive' and 'could send out his soul' for the good of Egypt. The 'opening of the mouth' either of a statue or of a mummy became part of regular funerary practice for the rich by which the heir established his claim to the inheritance of the deceased, and in some way restored his living presence and his powers to earth.⁵³

The importance of worshipping living statues and the powers which they exercise are dealt with in the *Asclepius*.⁵⁴ But the subject is also touched on in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Tat tells the king

The bodiless are reflected in bodies, and bodies in the bodiless, that is to say, the physical world is reflected in the mental and the mental in the physical. That is why you should worship the statues, because they contain the forms of the mind of the cosmos.⁵⁵

Worship of pagan statues was clearly not an occupation which a Christian priest could pursue in the fifteenth century, or indeed at any time. But practices which Ficino recommends in *De vita* for safeguarding health and prolonging life are based on a similar principle:

⁵² *Letters*, I, pp. 44–45.

⁵³ See Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, p. 122, and A. J. Spencer, *Death in Ancient Egypt*, Harmondsworth, 1982, pp. 52–54.

⁵⁴ Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, pp. 80–81.

⁵⁵ *Corpus Hermeticum*, XVII.

the attraction of divine powers into objects or substances with which those powers are associated, with a view to obtaining a physical result. In Book III, Ficino quotes with apparent approval various ancient authors who recommended these practices.

Ptolemy said in the *Centiloquium* that the images of things here below are subject to the celestial images and that the ancient wise men used to manufacture certain images, when the planets were entering similar faces of the heavens, the faces being as it were exemplars of things below.

Then Ficino proceeds to quote Hermes himself, 'Trismegistus says the Egyptians also used to make such images of specific cosmic materials and used to insert into them at the right time the souls of daemons and the soul of his ancestor Mercury.'⁵⁶

A little later Ficino gives his own advice, having already established such authoritative precedents:

If you obtain these Phoebean stones which we have been talking about, you will have no need to impress images on them. You should hang them, encased in gold, around your neck, on a yellow silk cord, when the Sun passes through Aries or Leo and is ascendant, or when it is mid-sky and facing the Moon.⁵⁷

The use of the right words to effect the operation of divine powers in a lower realm was important. The mere utterance of these could produce the desired result. This perhaps distinguishes a spell from a prayer which asks a boon from a god. A spell may take the form of a command or simply a statement of fact. There are many examples of both in the *Book of the Dead*. J. P. Sørensen has examined a number of New Kingdom papyri in which a hymn recited by the departing soul seems to cause the event of which the hymn sings. He writes, for example, of the *Hymn of Khonsu-renep* (c. 1085–945 BC), which is addressed to Re-Harakhty as the Sun, 'O Thou shining one in the sky, who illumine the Two Lands . . .' Sørensen continues by saying that the scene shown in the papyrus depicting the rising sun and Re-Harakhty in his boat illustrates or reproduces Khonsu-renep's hymn. Sørensen concludes, 'the hymn is instrumen-

⁵⁶ *De vita*, III, 13, tr. Kaske and Clark, pp. 304–307.

⁵⁷ *De vita*, III, 15, tr. Boer, p. 132, and Kaske and Clark, p. 315.

tal in making the sun rise; in a certain sense we might therefore say that the sunrise shown is produced or caused by the hymn'.⁵⁸

There are passages in the *Corpus Hermeticum* which seem to involve the same principle. In Book 13 Hermes appears to be testing the strength of his disciple Tat's desire for 'rebirth'. Tat is dissatisfied with the first responses Hermes gives to his question as to how rebirth is bestowed. Finally Hermes says 'Withdraw into yourself and it shall come. Will and it is so. Make idle the senses of the body and the spirit will be born. Cleanse yourself from the torments of the material world which arise from lack of reason.' Tat replies that he is unaware that he has tormentors, whereupon Hermes mentions twelve vices: ignorance, intemperance, lust, etc. After this he continues 'Be still, O son, and keep silence; thus God's mercy for us shall not cease. Rejoice now, O son, being thoroughly cleansed by the powers of God, you are thus united with the Word. Knowledge of God has come to us, and therefore ignorance has been banished.' Then he summons the ten opposing 'powers of God' upon which the vices 'all fly off with a great rush of wings'. Finally Tat exclaims, 'O father, I see the All and I see myself in *Nous*.' He has been reborn. This has come about owing to the expulsion of the twelve tormentors by the ten 'powers of God'. But Tat was not even aware that he had these tormentors. Thus the immediate cause of his rebirth was the words just recited by Hermes.⁵⁹

There are curious echoes of this style in Ficino. One such occurs in a letter which he addresses to Pope Sixtus IV after the latter had attacked Florence with his armies in alliance with King Ferrante of Naples. Ficino writes that the dire events now battering the 'Christian Ship' are taking place:

so that Sixtus, like Neptune rising in the midst of the storm with the trident of power, wisdom and benevolence, may soothe angry Aeolus, still the raging winds, calm the tumultuous sea and govern by divine virtue.

Soon it all begins to happen. Ficino writes:

⁵⁸ J. P. Sørensen, 'Ancient Egyptian Religious Thought and the XVIth Hermetic Tractate', in *The Religion of the Ancient Egyptians: Cognitive Structures and Popular Expressions*, ed. by Gertie Englund, Uppsala, 1989, pp. 41-57, at pp. 49-50.

⁵⁹ *Corpus Hermeticum*, XIII.7-13.

Now, everyone, hear! Hear the gracious voice of our shepherd.

Look more closely at his joyful countenance which brings all things to peace by its blessing. Surely you see it? Even now he is opening his mouth to cry out to his flock, with his Lord: 'Peace be with you my children . . . Be not afraid: I am no wolf, but a guardian, no hireling but a shepherd.'⁶⁰

This could be read as a lively piece of irony, but on a more profound level Ficino is envisaging that the Pope's attitude to Florence is actually changing as he reads the words of his letter. The emphasis is less on the appeal to reason than on the statement of fact.

In invoking the divine powers, Ficino attaches great importance to music, and in particular to finding the correct mode for each power. In *De vita* he writes 'It would be an extremely difficult task to decide which tones go with which stars, or which composition of tones goes with which stars and agrees with which aspects.'⁶¹ Later he writes 'We divide up this vast harmony of higher things into seven grades of things: images that are harmonically constituted, medicines tempered with a certain consonance, vapours and odours that are made with similar concinnity, and musical songs and sounds.'⁶²

In the *Corpus*, Poimandres gives an account of how a man finds his way back to God. He 'starts to rise up through the harmony of the cosmos'. Poimandres then explains how he rises up through each of the seven planes. 'Then stripped of the activities of the Cosmos, he enters the substance of the eighth plane with his own power and he sings praises to the Father with those who are present.'⁶³ The implication is that each of the planes is associated with a particular activity and has a particular 'music' associated with it.

Gilles Quispel has pointed out connections between Egyptian temple music and the *Corpus*. He quotes Demetrius of Alexandria (first century AD): 'When the priests of Egypt sing their hymns to praise their gods, they utter the seven vowels in the prescribed order, the sound of these seven vowels is so beautiful that people prefer it to flute or lyre.' Quispel continues, 'The seven vowels correspond to the seven notes of the octave, which were related to the seven plan-

⁶⁰ *Letters*, V, pp. 16-17.

⁶¹ *De vita*, III.21, tr. Boer, p. 160, and Kaske and Clark, p. 357.

⁶² *Ibid.*, III.22, tr. Boer, p. 164, and Kaske and Clark, p. 363.

⁶³ *Corpus Hermeticum*, I.25-26.

ets.⁶⁴ The prime object of hymns is praise, and hymns of praise seem to have a special function in the Hermetic system. They seem to lead directly to the 'second birth', that moment of gnosis, the immediate realization of the reality of spirit: that is, of man's divine and unlimited nature, his identity with God.

In Book 5, Hermes begins a hymn of praise to God:

How can you be praised to others or to yourself? And where shall I look to praise you: above, below, inside or outside? For you there is no direction, no place, nor any other being. All is within you, all comes from you. You give everything and take nothing. For you have everything and there is nothing you do not have. When shall I sing your praises? For it is not possible to find your hour or your season. For what shall I praise you? For what you have created or what you have not created? For what you have revealed or for what you have hidden? And why shall I praise you? Because you are of my own nature? Because you have what is your own? Because you are other? But you are whatever I am; you are whatever I do; you are whatever I speak. You are all things and there is nothing else.⁶⁵

The most striking feature of this passage is the recognition by Hermes of his absolute identity with God. It almost seems to take place as he is singing the hymn.

At the end of the thirteenth book of the *Corpus*, when Tat is reborn, he explains to Hermes, 'O Father, I see the All and I see myself in *Nous*.' Hermes replies, 'This is rebirth, O son, no longer to picture oneself with regard to the three-dimensional body.' Then Tat tells Hermes that he wishes to hear the hymn of praise 'which was there to be heard from the powers, on my birth into the eighth sphere'. Hermes then sings *The Secret Hymn* to him, after which Tat expresses the wish to sing his own hymn of praise, which is granted.⁶⁶ Thus hymns of praise are to be sung even after realization of the divine nature.

In the papyri of the Egyptian New Kingdom, praise, followed by a statement of the divinity of him who is offering the praise, is not uncommon. For examples Spell 8 in the *Book of the Dead* (c. 1250 BC) reads:

⁶⁴ *Asclepius*, ed. and tr. by Gilles Quispel, Amsterdam, 1996, quoted in *The Way of Hermes*, p. 84. Cf. Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. and tr. by M. J. B. Allen, Berkeley etc., 1975, pp. 270-72.

⁶⁵ *Corpus Hermeticum*, V.10-11.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, XIII.13-22.

Hermopolis is opened and my head is sealed: O Thoth, the eye of Horus is unblemished, the eye of Horus saves me and splendid are my ornaments from the brow of Re, father of the gods; I am this Osiris here in the west. Osiris knows his day and if he does not exist in it, I will not exist in it. I am Re who is with the gods and I will not perish; stand up, Horus, that I may number you among the gods.⁶⁷

It is significant that Ficino's long epistle to Bernardo Bembo in Book I of the Letters, is entitled *Oratorical, moral, dialectical and theological praise of philosophy*. It is a letter of praise and the praise of Philosophy culminates when through Philosophy the individual arrives at union with God. Ficino writes:

At length, what is more wonderful than words can tell . . . [the soul] soars beyond the vault of heaven to the creator of heaven and earth Himself. There through the gift of Philosophy, not only is the soul filled with happiness, but since in a sense it becomes God, it also becomes that very happiness.

The letter ends in the Hermetic tradition with a hymn of ecstatic praise.

O most wonderful intelligence of the heavenly architect! O eternal wisdom born only from the head of highest Jove! O infinite truth and goodness of creation, sole queen of the Universe! O true and bountiful light of intelligence! O healing warmth of the will! O generous flame of our heart! Illumine us, we beg, shed your light on us and fire us, so that we inwardly blaze with the love of your light, that is of truth and wisdom.⁶⁸

A note of ecstatic praise with a simultaneous realization of unity is also given in Ficino's *Theological dialogue between God and the Soul*.

My God has come to me, the God of the universe has embraced me. The God of Gods even now enters my inmost being. Now indeed God himself nourishes me wholly, and he who created me recreates me. He who brought forth the soul, transforms it into angel, turns it into God. How shall I give thanks to you, O grace of graces?⁶⁹

In Hermes the realization of this divine state was the supreme goal of human life. In Book IV, those who have raised themselves and seen the Supreme Good and realized it in themselves 'regard time

⁶⁷ *The Book of the Dead*, tr. Faulkner, p. 36.

⁶⁸ *Letters*, I, pp. 190-91.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 39.

spent here as a misfortune. Disregarding the gross and subtle they hasten to the One alone.⁷⁰ Earlier in the *Corpus*, Poimandres tells Hermes, 'This is the end, the Supreme Good, for those who have had the higher knowledge: to become God.'⁷¹ François Daumas considered that the ancient Egyptian sages held a similar view. He writes, 'This remedy of immortality, which Diodorus said had been found by Isis, the sages of Egypt had known for a long time to consist in acquiring the divine state.'⁷²

Having realized the truth about his nature it is the duty of the wise to teach others, and to propagate 'children'. 'Children' in this context, of course, means disciples who will attain wisdom themselves. This is the meaning of the last paragraph in Book II of the *Corpus*, where Hermes states, 'The Father's nature is to create. Therefore, the raising of children is held in the greatest esteem in life and most blessed by right-thinking people.'⁷³ When Hermes himself becomes illumined in Book I, Poimandres says to him, 'Why do you delay? Should you not, having received all, become the guide to those who are worthy, so that the human race may be saved by God through you?'⁷⁴ Daumas quotes a passage from the tomb of Petosiris at Hermopolis which indicates that Petosiris continues to instruct, even after death!

Whoever comes to this mountain and sees this tomb I will see that you are instructed in the wishes of God. I will guide you towards the way of life . . . If you listen to my words and apply yourself to them, you will prove their usefulness. The road of him who is faithful to God is a good one.⁷⁵

Ficino in his letter to Lorenzo Lippi also encourages teachers to give spiritual instruction:

What you have freely learned from God, the master of all truth, freely teach. It is utterly wrong that knowledge, which is by nature free, should bear a price. All praise to him who has learned without reserve

⁷⁰ *Corpus Hermeticum*, IV.5 (also quoted at note 29 above).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, I.26.

⁷² François Daumas, 'Le fonds égyptien de l'hermétisme', in *Gnosticisme et monde hellénistique: Actes du colloque de Louvain-la-Neuve (11-14 mars 1980)*, ed. by J. Ries, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1982, pp. 3-25, at p. 14.

⁷³ *Corpus Hermeticum*, II.17.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, I.26.

⁷⁵ Daumas, 'Le fonds égyptien', p. 17.

and who teaches without jealousy . . . We may count our pupils as our spiritual sons. And if fathers beget bodily children with pleasure, why should not teachers beget spiritual offspring with joy?⁷⁶

By the second and third centuries AD, when the Greek texts of the *Hermetica* were written down in Alexandria, Egypt had long been a centre for many peoples and races. Garth Fowden considers that in general people from these different nations within Egypt did not at first mingle very much culturally and socially. But by the beginning of the Christian era, especially in those areas intensively settled by Greeks, such as Alexandria, a mixed race had come into existence.⁷⁷ Here the schools which grew up reflected and fused teachings from different traditions. The possible influences of Platonic, Stoic, Jewish, Egyptian and Iranian sources on the *Corpus* has already been referred to. The purpose of this paper has been to focus on some Egyptian parallels without postulating any unmediated debts or connections. The connection between the *Corpus* and Ficino, however, is less open to doubt. That both he and his patron Cosimo regarded the work as of supreme importance is witnessed by the fact that at Cosimo's behest Ficino suspended his work on Plato to undertake and complete the translation of the *Corpus*. At this stage Ficino regarded Hermes as the original *priscus theologus*, and he continued throughout his life to hold him in high regard. He refers to him on many occasions with obvious approbation.

The main concepts which seem to have counterparts in ancient Egyptian thought which have been discussed here may thus be summarized briefly. First there is the paramount concept of the One itself which nourishes the whole Cosmos and mysteriously is everything within the cosmos while not departing from its unity. This 'One' is likened to the Sun, which has two aspects: it is the bestower of physical life on the one hand and on the other it is the outward form of the supreme power. As the Creator it contains the properties of both sexes within itself. As the Supreme, having given birth to the first Intelligence, which like the Supreme is unmanifest, it then assigns the creation of lower beings to that Intelligence.

There are many connections also with regard to the relationship between man and God. In the first place divine powers may be

⁷⁶ *Letters*, I, p. 164.

⁷⁷ Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, rev. edn, Princeton, 1993, pp. 17–18.

attracted into particular objects or materials and used for human purposes. But above all, the true nature of man is divine and through wisdom and purity of living he has the possibility of rediscovering his divine nature and eventually merging with God. Moved by the beauty of the creation, he may approach Him through love and finally unite with Him in praise. Such is his supreme goal.

Up to the middle of the twentieth century it appeared that Isaac Casaubon had done an extremely successful job in burning down the Egyptian edifice upon which Ficino's Hermes stood. But like the phoenix to which Ficino sometimes refers, his ancient theology has in some respects risen from its own ashes. The substantial influences upon the *Corpus* of other, non-Egyptian sources have been discussed and acknowledged earlier in this paper, yet from the further evidence adduced by scholars in recent years it would seem that Ficino's insistence upon the existence of a *prisca theologia* going back into the remote Egyptian past may not have been so totally wide of the mark.

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PRISCA THEOLOGIA IN MARSILIO FICINO AND IN SOME JEWISH TREATMENTS

Moshe Idel

1. *Unilinear and Multilinear Theories of Prisca Theologia*

Those aspects of Renaissance thought which constitute 'occult philosophy' operated with two basic forms of religious lore both claiming, or at least attributed to, hoary antiquity: the Greek and Hellenistic corpora translated by Marsilio Ficino into Latin, and the Kabbalistic literature, studied in Hebrew or in Latin translation. This double, coincident and sudden encounter invited the emergence of strategies of validation and legitimation to appropriate them in an intellectual and religious atmosphere dominated by Christian dogmatics. Indeed, Christian intellectuals in the West encountered, for the first time, fully-fledged treatises which included doctrines that proposed Platonism and the various versions of Neoplatonism not only as authoritative philosophical sources but also as transmitters of religious doctrines, which were expounded in an esoteric manner. This theory is known as *prisca theologia*. In the last generation scholarship has paid due attention to this theory in the Christian Renaissance, contributing seminal studies to the topic.¹

¹ See D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, London, 1972; Charles Schmitt, 'Perennial Philosophy from Agostino Steuco to Leibniz', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 27 (1966), pp. 505–32; idem, "'Prisca Theologia" e "Philosophia Perennis": Due temi del Rinascimento italiano e loro fortuna', in *Il pensiero italiano del Rinascimento e il tempo nostro*, ed. by G. Tarugi, Florence, 1970, pp. 211–36; Paul O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, ed. by Michael Mooney, New York, 1979, pp. 196–210; Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness. Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols, Chicago and London, 1970; repr. Notre Dame, Ind., 1995, II, pp. 726–42, 754–56; James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Leiden etc., 1990, pp. 459–63; Chaim Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, Cambridge, Mass., etc., 1989, p. 198, n. 41; Michael J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Florence, 1998, pp. 1–49; Ilana Klutstein, *Marsilio Ficino et la théologie ancienne: Oracles chaldaïques, Hymnes orphiques, Hymnes de Proclus*, Florence, 1987; Brigitte Tambrun, 'Marsile Ficin et le Commentaire de Pléthon sur les Oracles chaldaïques', *Accademia. Revue de la Société Marsile Ficin*, 1 (1999), pp. 9–48.

Ficino's contribution to this theological strategy was decisive, and much of what happened after his translations and commentaries was the reiteration of his ideas about chains of transmission of the ancient lore. In the following essay, an attempt will be made to accentuate some aspects of Ficino's historiography of knowledge which have not yet been highlighted. The brief discussions of the Jewish material will not only add points of comparison but, in the case of Ficino, may throw light on nuances in his fluctuating view of *prisca theologia*, which was also shaped by his debate with Judaism.² In any case, it is clear from some of the discussions below, as well as some that cannot be addressed in this framework, that Kabbalistic contents, some of which are not to be found in other forms of Judaism, helped in the adoption and adaptation by some Jewish intellectuals of themes that permeate the *corpus* translated by Ficino. I would say that the privileged status enjoyed by Kabbalah, conceived of as an ancient Jewish mystical theology, in Ficino's circle should be taken into consideration when dealing with his views of *prisca theologia*, as is the case with other Renaissance instances, most remarkably Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore*.³

There were two main theories that allowed the adoption of those doctrines into a Christian monotheistic framework: the first contends that they agree with Christian theology because they were influenced by a primeval tradition which included or at least adumbrated the tenets of Christianity; the alternative argues that the affinity between these two bodies of thought has no historical explanation but is the result of a revelation or a series of revelations imparted separately

² See Armando F. Verde, *Lo studio fiorentino, 1473-1503, Ricerche e documenti*, 5 vols, Florence, 1973-94, IV.1 (1985), pp. 126-27; Cf. Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, p. 464. For Jewish theories of *prisca theologia* in the Renaissance period, see David B. Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science, The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician*, Cambridge, Mass., 1988, pp. 139-60; Moshe Idel, 'Kabbalah and Ancient Philosophy in R. Isaac and Yehudah Abravanel', in *The Philosophy of Leone Ebreo*, ed. by M. Dorman and Z. Lev, Tel Aviv, 1985, pp. 73-112 (in Hebrew); idem, 'Kabbalah, Platonism, and "Prisca Theologia": The Case of Menasseh ben Israel', in *Menasseh Ben Israel and His World*, ed. by Y. Kaplan, H. Mechoulam and R. H. Popkin, Leiden, 1989, pp. 207-19.

³ See Idel, 'Kabbalah and Ancient Philosophy'. In general I would say that the discussions of *prisca theologia* in the studies mentioned in n. 1 above have neglected both Kabbalah and Leone Ebreo's views. See, however, the important study of Bernard McGinn, 'Cabalists and Christians: Reflections on Cabala in Medieval and Renaissance Thought', in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. by R. H. Popkin and G. M. Weiner, Dordrecht and London, 1994, pp. 11-34.

to both pagan and monotheistic spiritual leaders. The two solutions represent different approaches to the historiography of religion, and their underlying assumptions are worth more detailed analysis.

The first theory implies that there was one single revelation of religious truth, though more than one single line of transmitting the valid religious doctrines may be assumed. The source is the Mosaic tradition—sometimes related to an Adamic or Abrahamic tradition—which was handed down to pagan philosophers such as Plato and Pythagoras. Sometimes Hermes, the focal figure of some lists of *prisca theologi*, was even appropriated by Jewish writers in the Renaissance, such as Yohanan Alemanno and Isaac Abravanel, as being identical to the biblical Enoch.⁴ This approach will be designated in what follows as the unilinear theory. It was espoused by what can be called ‘orthodox syncretism’ in late antiquity, among Jewish Alexandrian authors, in Flavius Josephus, in some Fathers of the Church, by some figures during the Middle Ages, and also by some scholars in the Renaissance.⁵ A major example of the assumption that the *prisca theologia* consists of a unilinear theory can be found in a statement of Charles Schmitt, an eminent scholar and major investigator of this topic:

At the root of Ficino’s concept [of the *prisca theologia*] lie several writings attributed to pre-Greek authors, especially Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, and Orpheus, which according to his interpretation were transmitted to Plato by Pythagoras and Aglaophemus. These writings were also considered to be connected at the root with Hebrew Scriptures, thus making Greek philosophy have a very close relation indeed with the Judaeo-Christian tradition.⁶

The unilinear theory draws its inspiration from Jewish and patristic sources of late antiquity. The most important names are Artapanus, Alexander Polyhistor, Flavius Josephus, Lactantius, Eusebius, Augustine and Clement of Alexandria.⁷ The unilinear theory was developed also in the Renaissance, mostly by Jewish authors. The most famous

⁴ See Idel, ‘Kabbalah and Ancient Philosophy’, pp. 75–76.

⁵ See Norman Roth, ‘The “Theft of Philosophy” by the Greeks from the Jews’, *Classical Folia*, 32 (1978), pp. 53–67.

⁶ From Schmitt’s introduction to the reprint of Augustinus Steuchus, *De perenni philosophia*, New York and London, 1972, p. ix. See also Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, pp. 739–42.

⁷ See the early sources enumerated by Roth, ‘The “Theft of Philosophy”’, and Raymond Marcel, *Marsile Ficin (1433–1499)*, Paris, 1958, pp. 612–22.

pagan figure who was described as learning from the ancient Jews was Plato, mentioned in a variety of Jewish and Christian sources as having been the student of a prophet, sometimes identified with Jeremiah, in Egypt. Let me mention two more of several Renaissance examples which portray the high status of Plato and the consonance of his teaching with Judaism. The first is R. Yohanan Alemanno, a contemporary of Ficino and a companion of Pico who lived for several years in Florence. He regarded Plato as having been in alignment with Jewish culture. In his commentary on the *Song of Songs* he distinguishes between two ancient types of philosophers. The first is:

the sect of the ancient ones, from venerable antiquity up to the generation when prophecy disappeared. They and their sons and disciples thirstily drank their [the prophets'] words up to Plato who was in their [the prophets'] days and in their times. The second sect commenced when prophecy ceased and the days of evil came, from the time of Aristotle and later, up to our days.⁸

Clearly Platonic lore is described as being the result of the influence of the Hebrew prophets. In fact, valid philosophy is considered to be contemporary with ancient Israelite prophecy and as having ceased together with it.

A similar approach is found in the work of a seventeenth-century Kabbalistic figure, R. Joseph Shelomo Delmedigo. In his *Matzref le-Hokhmah* he says:

The ancient philosophers spoke more virtuously than Aristotle, to those who understood them correctly, not as Aristotle interpreted them, for his intentions were solely to reproach them so he himself would be praised. This becomes clear to anyone who reads what has been written on the wisdom of Democritus and its foundations, especially by Plato, the master of Aristotle. Plato's opinions are similar to the opinions of the Sages of Israel and in a few instances it appears that he spoke as a Kabbalist. No fault can be found in his words, and why should we not accept them, for they belong to us, and were inherited by the Greeks from our ancient fathers? Even until this day many of the great sages accept Plato's ideas, and there are large circles of students who have continued in his footsteps.⁹

⁸ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Or. 1535, fol. 162v.

⁹ Jerusalem, 1944, fol. 54a. On Delmedigo's different attitudes to the Presocratics and to Aristotle see my 'Differing Conceptions of Kabbalah in the Early Seventeenth Century', in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. by Isadore Twersky and Bernard D. Septimus, Cambridge, Mass., 1987, pp. 185-96.

However, while those two authors belong to what can be described as a more universalistic approach to Kabbalah, which saw pagan philosophy in positive terms, there were also other, less positive descriptions of the same type of affinities. In more extreme and general terms, R. Elijah Hayyim ben Benjamin of Genazzano, a late fifteenth-century Italian Kabbalist, explicitly refers to philosophers as thieves of the ancient Jewish wisdom, Kabbalah.¹⁰ It is from the tradition stemming from Abraham the patriarch, the alleged author of the cosmological treatise *Sefer Yetzirah*, that philosophers adopted the idea of the ten supernal entities, known as 'ten separate intellects'. These entities are no more than a misunderstanding of the Kabbalistic interpretation of the ten *Sefirot*, a key notion in the ancient Jewish treatise. Incapable of comprehending the secret of the dynamic unity of the ten divine powers, the philosophers, 'who are in any case the thieves of wisdom',¹¹ introduced division into the divine realm.¹²

The Christian Renaissance thinkers seem, however, to have been fascinated more by another theory, which I should like to designate 'multilinear'. This latter theory seems to have been influenced in part by the views of a mid fifteenth-century Byzantine author who had strong pagan proclivities, George Gemistos Plethon. It was he who was instrumental in introducing into western Renaissance thought the name of Zoroaster as a reliable religious source and it seems very plausible that it was also Plethon who inspired those of Ficino's genealogies in which Zoroaster has a place of honour. Ficino embraced some views of Plethon, and apparently also of Diogenes Laertius and Plutarch, which contributed to the turning away in the West from the earlier traditions concerning a unilinear theory to embrace the hypothesis of two or more lines of transmission.¹³ The multilinear version of *prisca theologia* assumes the possibility of more than one source of valid religious knowledge and more than one line of transmission. Though the contents of this knowledge are identical in the

¹⁰ See his *Iggeret Hamudot*, ed. by A. W. Greenup, London, 1912, pp. 32–33.

¹¹ *'al kol panim gonvei ha-hokhmah*.

¹² On this Kabbalist see Roland Goetschel, 'Elie Hayyim de Genazzano et la Kabbale', *Revue des études juives*, 142 (1983), pp. 91–108; Alexander Altmann, 'Beyond the Realm of Philosophy: R. Elijah ben Benjamin of Genazzano', in *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume*, ed. by M. Idel, W. Z. Harvey and E. Schweid, Jerusalem, 1988, part I, pp. 61–101 (in Hebrew).

¹³ For a cautious evaluation of Plethon's impact on the Renaissance, including Ficino, see Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, II, pp. 436–40; Allen, *Synoptic Art*, pp. 1–2 and the relevant bibliography cited there.

two or more lines of transmission, their literary or terminological expressions differ from one case to another. It is this second theory that deserves more attention in the framework of the specificity of Christian Renaissance thought, because it is more problematic from a strictly monotheistic point of view; equally it is more innovative in comparison to the late ancient and medieval endeavours to point out the concordance between Greek thought and monotheistic religion. Let me quote one expression of this view, as formulated by Pico della Mirandola:

Iamblichus of Chalcis writes that Pythagoras followed the Orphic theology as the model on which he fashioned and built his own philosophy. Nay furthermore, they say that the maxims of Pythagoras are alone called holy, because he proceeded from the principles of Orpheus; and that the secret doctrine of numbers and whatever Greek philosophy has of the great or the sublime has flowed from thence as its first fount.¹⁴

From our point of view the occurrence of the term 'first fount' should be highlighted. Orpheus is regarded as the source of the most sublime facets of Greek philosophy and I see no way of contending that Pico linked this mythical figure, or others mentioned in this quotation, with a Mosaic tradition. His views, as he mentions several times, can be interpreted in accordance with the Kabbalistic traditions, but it is the mythical poet and theologian who is responsible for the formulation of the concepts which will later be expounded by Pythagoras too.

Last but not least: the *prisca theologi* are mentioned in one of the reports relating to Pico's reactions to Savonarola's confrontations with the Florentine Platonists, as recounted by Piero Crinito:

In every age there have been a few predominant thinkers, supreme both in judgement and knowledge, such as Moses, Pythagoras, Hermes, Zoroaster, and Solon who, all agree together, not only believed these things, but also powerfully proclaimed them.¹⁵

Though occupying a place of honour immediately next to Moses, the pagan thinkers are independent ancient theologians. Later on in the same context, Pico is reported to have embraced a view which combines both a unilinear and a multilinear attitude:

¹⁴ *Oratio de dignitate hominis*, translated by Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, II, p. 758.

¹⁵ Quoted in the translation of Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 49.

That divine philosophy of Pythagoras, which they call Magic, belongs to a great extent to the Mosaic tradition; since Pythagoras had managed to reach the Jews and their doctrine in Egypt, and knowledge of many of their sacred mysteries . . . Zoroaster, the son of Oromasius, in practising magic, took that to be the cult of God and the study of divinity; while engaged in this in Persia he most successfully investigated every virtue and power of nature, in order to know those sacred and sublime secrets of the divine intellect; which subject many people called theurgy, others Cabala or magic.¹⁶

While Pythagoras is now described as dependent on Mosaic tradition, this is not the case with Zoroaster, whose views indeed correspond to Kabbalah but are not influenced by it.

It should be clear that the multilinear theory is not in itself identical with the double faith theory, or with what was understood as Averroism in Latin in the medieval and Renaissance periods. Though here also the assumption is that there are two different sources of the truth, but according to the multilinear theory the nature of the truth is similar in each case, though perhaps not totally identical. Unlike Averroism, which professed the co-existence of two different truths, something which will be addressed again below, the multilinear theory assumes a variety of sources but a unity of the truths conveyed by the various religious and philosophical traditions.

Interestingly enough, some evidence points to the possibility that one of Plethon's teachers in Byzantium was a Jew, a certain Elisha, who was acquainted with Averroistic philosophy and medicine, and with Zoroastrian thought.¹⁷ Was he the source of Plethon's conception of Zoroaster as an independent and reliable religious source?

¹⁶ Quoted in the translation of Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 50.

¹⁷ See C. M. Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes*, Oxford, 1986, pp. 23–28; Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, pp. 133–34, 612; Efraim Wust, 'Elisha the Greek: A Physician and Philosopher at the Beginning of the Ottoman Period', *Pe'amim*, 41 (1989), pp. 49–57 (in Hebrew). François Masai, *Pléthon et le platonisme de Mistra*, Paris, 1956, p. 57, aired the possibility that Elisha was a Kabbalist, while Michel Tardieu, 'Pléthon lecteur des Oracles', *Métis*, 2 (1987), pp. 141–64, at p. 144, n. 7, rejected this possibility, implying (see especially p. 141) that he was a Spanish Jewish thinker acquainted with Averroes's thought who arrived in Adrianople. Though there is indeed no evidence that Elisha was a Kabbalist, an interest in Averroes does not in principle exclude an interest in Kabbalah, as can be seen in the case of Abraham Abulafia, the figure who introduced Kabbalah in the Byzantine empire in the seventies of the thirteenth century. Also later, in the middle of the fourteenth century in Constantinople, a combination of interest in both Kabbalah and medieval philosophy is evident in R. Elnathan ben Moshe Kalkish's *'Eoen Sappir*, a huge manuscript treatise extant in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MSS or. 727–728.

To believe George Scholarios, Plethon's critic who is our only witness to the relationship between Elisha and Plethon, this seems to be the case, though it is hard to argue with him for lack of alternative sources. Besides, Scholarios was so preoccupied with denigrating Plethon and pointing to the sources of his heresies that he might have been exaggerating. He might have lumped together Zoroastrianism and Averroism as erroneous types of thought and imputed them both to the teaching of Elisha. According to Scholarios, Elisha himself, though a Jew, was not too much concerned with the Mosaic tradition.¹⁸ Scholarios may have been right, and if so, Elisha made a modest contribution to the subsequent infiltration of the pagan theurgy found in the *Chaldaean Oracles* (a book allegedly authored by Zoroaster) into the Renaissance via Plethon and Ficino.

Nevertheless it is still possible that this Elisha was not as pagan a Hellene as Scholarios makes out, since syntheses between Greek philosophies of pagan extraction and Judaism were already well known beforehand. There was also a Persian-Arab tradition to the effect that Zoroaster was a pupil of Jeremiah,¹⁹ while according to other Jewish sources Zoroaster studied with Abraham.²⁰ Thus, resorting to the name of Zoroaster in the Hebrew sources would not, automatically, invite a multilinear vision of knowledge. Following the view of some scholars, it is plausible to assume that Elisha could have been part of a school of mystics starting with the twelfth-century Muslim Sufi master, Suhrawardi al-Maqtul, called Ishraqi (the illuminated), or the oriental scholars who conceived of Zoroaster as an important religious thinker.²¹ The multilinear theory is, in comparison

¹⁸ See Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*, pp. 24–25; Tardieu, 'Pléthon lecteur des Oracles', pp. 144–46.

¹⁹ See James Darmesteter, 'Textes Pehlvis relatifs au Judaïsme', *Revue des études juives*, 19 (1889), p. 56. It may well be that this is an elaboration of the earlier view that Plato studied with the prophet, an issue which lies outside the scope of this article.

²⁰ For a possible source of this view, see J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés: Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspe d'après la tradition grecque*, 2 vols, Paris, 1938; repr. New York, 1975, II, p. 21. On Zoroaster as Abraham's student see *ibid.*, I, p. 41 and II, p. 48. As to the Hebrew sources for such a position, see M. J. bin Gorion, *Die Sagen der Juden*, Berlin, 1935, p. 219.

²¹ See Henry Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, Paris, 1964, pp. 285–86; Tardieu, 'Pléthon lecteur des Oracles', pp. 144–46; Tambrun, 'Marsile Ficino', pp. 20–22, and Shlomo Pines's remarks in the discussion following the lecture of François Masai, 'Pléthon, l'Averroïsme et le problème religieux', in *Le Néoplatonisme. Actes du Colloque international, Royaumont, 9–13 juin 1969*, ed. by P. M. Schuhl and P. Hadot, Paris, 1971, p. 445; Wust, 'Elisha the Greek', p. 56. For other, more direct influences

to the unilinear one, much more problematic from a monotheistic religious point of view. It assumes the dominant role of pagan figures who are presented as possessors of religious truth which are, at least potentially, identical with the tenets of the 'advanced' form of religion. The danger of criticism stemming from orthodox circles was obvious and this seems to be one of the reasons why the theory was not expounded in a more elaborate manner in the writings of the first Renaissance authors dealing with this subject. Inconsistency also complicates a clear-cut formulation of where the unilinear theory stands.

Marsilio Ficino took different attitudes in different books. Even the leading scholars who have analyzed the matter have accordingly come to different evaluations. Charles Schmitt, whose view has been quoted above, represented Ficino as closer to the unilinear theory. In his reading, ultimately, the pagan philosophy was conceived of as derived from the Mosaic tradition, and thus Ficino was a classic representative of the unilinear theory. However, another leading authority on Ficino, the late Paul O. Kristeller (who was Schmitt's teacher), expressed another view: the Florentine thinker surmised that the pagan writings

form an ancient tradition of pagan theology and philosophy that is as old as that of the Hebrew and Christian religion, going back to Mercurius Trismegistus, a contemporary of Moses. Thus there arises in his view a more or less continuous tradition in two different but parallel branches, philosophical or pagan, and religious or Hebrew and Christian that extends in a nearly continuous line from the early days of Moses and Trismegistus down to his own day.²²

The quandary is indeed a real one and can be explained quite simply: the two eminent scholars were, I assume, paying attention to some

of Muslim sources on Florentine Renaissance thought see Shlomo Pines, 'Medieval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb? Some Jewish and Arabic Sources of Leone Ebreo's Doctrines', in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. by B. D. Cooperman, Cambridge, Mass., 1983, pp. 390-91; M. Idel, 'The Anthropology of Yohanan Alemanno: Sources and Influences', *Annali di storia dell'esegesi*, 7 (1990), pp. 93-112; idem, 'The Ladder of Ascension: The Reverberations of a Medieval Motif in the Renaissance', *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature, II*, ed. by Isadore Twersky, Cambridge, Mass., 1984, pp. 83-93; idem, 'Magic Temples and Cities in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 3 (1981-82), pp. 185-89; idem, 'The Sources of the Circle Images in *Dialoghi d'Amore*', *Iyyun*, 28 (1978), pp. 162-66 (in Hebrew), and the study referred to in note 26 below.

²² Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, p. 205; in his *Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by V. Conant, New York, 1943; repr. Gloucester, Mass., 1964, pp. 27-29, Kristeller's formulations are less sharp.

specific texts instead of others and so the two different evaluations of Ficino's view emerged. In Ficino's commentaries on Plato, and already in his *Proemium* to the translation of the Hermetic corpus, the independence of the pagan line, or lines, from a Mosaic fount is clear. No intersection between the ancient sources of the *prisci theologi* and the Hebrew Scriptures was allowed. On the basis of these writings, which draw their inspiration from pagan sources, Kristeller is clearly correct. However, in his *De Christiana religione*, ch. 25–26, Ficino collected several traditions related to the legendary encounters between the mythical pagan figures and the Jews. In the case of this chapter, it is obvious that Schmitt is right, and we shall return to this point later on. Thus it seems that Ficino made different pronouncements in different books, apparently for different intellectual purposes. Books or commentaries on philosophy will allow separate sources for a *prisca theologia*, whereas a definitely religious work, such as *De Christiana religione*, governed by the need to subject philosophy to revelation, provoked a different attitude.

Recently, a third suggestion has been advanced in order to make sense of the two different positions taken by Ficino which I designated above as unilinear and multilinear. In his study of Platonism in Italy, James Hankins presents a developmental approach to Ficino's concept of *prisca theologia* as a transition from a radical 'youthful' position—what I call a multilinear stand—to a more 'mature' attitude that attenuates the independence of the pagan line of descent from the Mosaic tradition.²³ While Kristeller's and Schmitt's descriptions of Ficino are general, addressing different books without taking into consideration the divergences between them, Hankins's explanation recognizes the difference between them and strives to mitigate the tension by a developmental approach. The problem I find with this explanation is that Ficino preserved the multilinear theory late in his life, in the 1491 edition of his *Platonic Theology* and even in the third version of his commentary on Plato's *Philebus*, finished in 1496—years after he presented his version of the unilinear theory in his *De Christiana religione* in a passage to be adduced below. Moreover, a developmental theory does not easily fit the claim of a rupture with the past, hardly in my opinion a complete one, represented by the

²³ Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, II, p. 460 ff.

way Ficino's 'conversion' to Christianity was presented on his becoming a priest: *ex pagano Christi miles*. Did indeed Ficino stop his interest in the pagans while (or after) writing his apologetic treatise?

However, there is perhaps a fourth way to describe the relationship between the diverging presentations of *prisca theologia* in Ficino. I am inclined to attribute to him an Averroistic approach, close to the theory known as double truth. This does not mean, however, that Ficino assumed the superiority of the pagan philosophy over the Christian faith, merely its independence. Interestingly enough, this approach has also been suggested to be characteristic of Plethon,²⁴ and of Pico della Mirandola's *prisca theologia*,²⁵ and I have already interpreted some comments of R. Elijah del Medigo concerning Kabbalah and Platonism as reflecting this Averroistic approach.²⁶ From this perspective, it seems curious that in the hundreds of folios of Ficino's commentaries on Plato the name of Moses is so rarely mentioned. However, it seems that Ficino's real views can be deduced from the fact that the multilinear theory was expressed both before and after the composition and printing of *De Christiana religione*. Moreover, it is apparently significant that whereas in religious compositions like this apologetic treatise and in letters concerning Christian topics, Ficino brought together views from the patristic literature without always claiming explicitly that they were his, in the philosophical writings he presents the lists of the ancient philosophers without referring to any authority, implying that these represent his own views. Let me give one important example of this multilinear theory as presented by Ficino:

Why does everybody call God by four letters? The Hebrews by the four vowels *he ho ha hi*; the Egyptians by *Theuth*; the Persians by *Syre*; the Magi by *Orsi* whence *Oromasis*²⁷ the Greeks by *Theos*; ourselves by

²⁴ See Masai's study mentioned in n. 21 above. Compare also Maurice de Gandillac, 'Neoplatonism and Christian Thought in the Fifteenth Century: Nicholas of Cusa and Marsilio Ficino', in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. by D. J. O'Meara, Albany, NY, 1982, pp. 143–68, at p. 158. De Gandillac does not positively declare that Ficino used different approaches in books of different characters, though his formulation is close to such a statement.

²⁵ See Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, pp. 759–60; S. A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486)*, Tempe, Ariz., 1998, pp. 61–62.

²⁶ M. Idel, 'Jewish Mystical Thought in the Florence of Lorenzo il Magnifico', in *La cultura ebraica all'epoca di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, ed. by Dora Liscia Bemporad and Ida Zatelli, Florence, 1998, pp. 17–42, at pp. 31–32.

²⁷ Namely Ormuzd or Ahura Mazda. See also Allen, *Synoptic Art*, p. 35 note 67.

Deus; the Arab by *Alla*; Mahomed by *Abgdi*. Again, we accepted *Jesu* from Gabriel . . . Surely such diverse races would not otherwise have agreed on the one name of the unknown God, unless they were divinely inspired? And if they received it from Adam, it was by divine inspiration they received that name rather than others.²⁸

Two theoretically different explanations were proposed for the allegedly universal occurrence of the fourfold divine names: either all these nations received the various names separately, a clear multilinear theory, or they received them from Adam, which would imply an unilinear theory. However, even according to the second explanation each nation selected the characteristic divine name by means of an individual divine inspiration. Thus, a special revelation has been bestowed on each and every nation. Moreover, even if we accept the second explanation, the Jews have no priority as they also were conceived as having received their revelation later on. Thus, the basic structural similarity between the divine names, on whose source we shall have something to say presently, does not reflect the influence of the Mosaic tradition, but a common denominator which transcends the particular forms of the names in each and every nation. The very idea that the divine name constituted the content of an Adamic tradition was already known among the Jews in Spain and Italy, and I am not aware of a similar earlier Christian view. Hence it is possible that Ficino was influenced by a Jewish, or more exactly, a Kabbalistic tradition, but took it in a new direction. Though unilinear in its supposed origin, it was qualified so as to point to a possible multilinear theory. Also the curious manner in which Ficino vocalizes the Tetragrammaton—*he ho ha hi*—may point to a Kabbalistic source belonging to the school of ecstatic Kabbalah, where there are many cases of vocalizing the letters of the Tetragrammaton and pronouncing them. This Kabbalistic school sometimes embraced the theory of the Adamic extraction of Kabbalah. Abraham Abulafia contends, in a book written in 1289 in Messina, that the Kabbalistic tradition itself

extends from Adam to Abraham our forefather, and from him to Moses our master, and from him it comes to us in writing and orally and what comes to us in writing is divided into two types . . . the

²⁸ Marsilio Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. and tr. by M. J. B. Allen, Berkeley etc., 1975; repr. Tempe, Ariz., 2000, pp. 142–44; see also pp. 270–72.

matter of the names that are in the Torah . . . and those names that are derived from the essential name.²⁹

According to such a view, Adam was especially concerned with divine names, which means in this specific context that he was an ecstatic Kabbalist.³⁰

However, though I indeed assume such a Jewish source for some of the aspects of Ficino's passage, I assume that his emphasis on the four letters stems from a Pythagorean source, and I suspect that it has something to do with the Pythagorean *tetraktys* as discussed in Iamblichus's *De vita Pythagorica*.³¹ There the divinity of the tetrad is expressed in an explicit manner. It is, therefore, quite possible that the Pythagorean secret of the tetrad was the leading idea for Ficino's whole discussion. However, he does not mention Pythagoras in this context, and it seems that the first thinker to offer a more explicit comparison between the Tetragrammaton and the *tetraktys* was Ficino's younger contemporary Johann Reuchlin.

It would be instructive to compare Ficino's passage from his commentary on *Philebus* on the divine names, informed by a multilinear theory, to its elaboration in a work by a Jewish writer, R. Menasseh ben Israel. In his *Conciliator* R. Menasseh gives the above list of divine names, to which he adds some other examples, and then states,

From which it is inferred that except by some divine inspiration, or from the knowledge of the Tetragrammaton of four letters, so many different nations could not agree: which is most probable. Besides, among Europeans they corrupted the Tetragrammaton; they called the highest of the Gods Jove, and Jupiter is no more than *Jovispater*, Father God, the origin of all the other gods. The name of *Iah* also seems to have been known among them, whence Macrobius says, consulting the oracle of Apollo as to who was the supreme of all the gods, it answered

²⁹ *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, MS 1879, fol. 55v; E. R. Wolfson, 'The Doctrine of Sefirot in the Prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia', *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 2 (1995), pp. 336-71 and 3 (1996), pp. 47-84 at p. 73.

³⁰ For more on this issue, see M. Idel, 'Transmission in the Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah', in *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion*, ed. by Y. Elman and I. Gershoni, New Haven, Conn., and London, 2000, pp. 138-64.

³¹ Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean Way of Life*, ed. and tr. by John Dillon and Jackson Hershbell, Atlanta, Ga., 1991, p. 167, ch. 150; p. 177, ch. 162. On the tetrad as divine in late antiquity, see Walter Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, Cambridge, Mass., 1972, p. 72 ff. On this term see Johan C. Thom, *The Pythagorean Golden Verses*, Leiden, 1995, pp. 174-76.

Iao; and Diodorus Siculus says, the Jews attribute the laws they received from Moses to a God they called *Jao*; which name is that of *Jah*, pronounced differently by the heathen, from their ignorance of our language.³²

Elsewhere in the same book, this master proclaimed that

although some of the learned heathens, from the Hebrews, were acquainted with the quadri-letter name, they knew not the true pronunciation, which was privately communicated only to a few even of the Hebrew nation; nor did they invoke him in their orisons, but called on Jupiter, Mars, Apollo, and such like gods.³³

It is plausible that in this passage the corruption of the Tetragrammaton, mentioned in the first text, is the cause of the use of the names of the pagan divinities. Whereas Ficino does not mention the Tetragrammaton as the original divine name which was subsequently distorted by the gentiles, R. Menasseh does emphasize the priority of the Hebrew divine names, which were acknowledged even by the oracle of Apollo. If the Christian thinker expounded a multilinear theory, the Jewish author construed the same material into a unilinear theory.³⁴

2. Zoroaster as a Priscus Theologus

Our first example for describing the unilinear penchant of some early Jewish Renaissance authors is the 'earliest' mythical figure in some lines of *prisci theologi*: Zoroaster.³⁵ Ficino portrayed the theological knowledge of Zoroaster, a prominent figure in his list of the ancient theologians (and Pico, as we saw above, followed his path), without including a Mosaic source for his 'philosophy'. In doing so he was influenced by Plethon who identified Zoroaster as the author of the *Chaldaean Oracles*.³⁶ Ficino's list appears several times in his works and

³² Menasseh ben Israel, *Conciliator*, ed. and tr. by E. H. Lindo, 2 vols, London, 1842, II, p. 194.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

³⁴ For more on this issue see Idel, 'Kabbalah, Platonism', pp. 210–14, 216–19.

³⁵ On Zoroaster in the Renaissance see the survey of Karl H. Dannenfeldt, 'The Pseudo-Zoroastrian Oracles in the Renaissance', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 4 (1957), pp. 7–30, and Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter*, esp. p. 244. On Zoroaster in Hellenistic thought, see Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom*, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 2–3 and 142–43.

³⁶ See Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*, pp. 48–61.

the most common later sequence of the pagan sages is: Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras, culminating with Plato.³⁷ In at least one instance in Ficino it seems that this legendary figure was portrayed as acquiring his religious knowledge by himself. After enumerating the names of the sages mentioned Ficino maintains that:

they brought themselves as near as possible to God's ray by releasing their souls,³⁸ and since they examined by the light of that ray³⁹ all things by uniting and dividing through the one and the many, they too were made to participate in the truth.⁴⁰

This assessment is of paramount importance for the proper understanding of the nature of the ancient theology as envisioned by both Ficino and Pico. By a purifying way, or a mystical technique, the ancient pagan theologians brought themselves into contact with the divine light. It is quite possible that the passage betrays the influence of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, which were attributed in the Renaissance to Zoroaster; using theurgic methods, the ancient figures were able to release their souls in order to attain communion with the divine ray. Participation in the truth is not the result of a revelation but of the ascent of the theurgist's soul to the source of the Truth. Importantly, Ficino traces the earliest expression of the *prisca theologia* to Zoroaster. The last in this line is none other than Plato. It is this attribution of the ultimate origin of philosophy to Zoroaster that is characteristic of many of the Christian Renaissance syntheses, by contrast with contemporary Jewish insistence on the ancient Mosaic origin of Greek and pagan thought. In this context, it should be mentioned that

³⁷ See, e.g., Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, London, 1964, pp. 14–15; Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, pp. 181, 271, 357, 403, and Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom*, pp. 142–44. Allen underscores the priority of Zoroaster for Ficino and the link between Zoroaster and the Magi of the Gospels; see his *Synoptic Art*, p. 31 ff.

³⁸ On the separation of the soul from the body as part of the teaching of the Chaldaeans see Hans Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*, rev. edn, Paris, 1978, pp. 186–88.

³⁹ On the centrality of the ray and light in the *Chaldaean Oracles* see Lewy, *ibid.*, pp. 60–61, 149–55, 185–200. See also Ficino's *Theologia Platonica*, X.8, which corresponds to the *Chaldaean Oracles*, verses 13–14; cf. Ilana Klutstein-Roitman, *Les Traductions latines des Oracles chaldaïques et des Hymnes Orphiques*, Ph.D. Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1981, pp. 22–23.

⁴⁰ Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, p. 246. On Truth as a cosmic entity in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, see Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles*, pp. 144–48.

several of Pico's *Conclusiones* where Zoroaster is mentioned have been interpreted according to Kabbalistic notions.⁴¹ *Prima facie*, this fact may be understood as acknowledging a certain type of historical affinity between Zoroaster and Kabbalah. Indeed, there is no doubt that in Pico's eyes a phenomenological affinity existed. However, it seems that it remained an affinity rather than an historical filiation in any sense. This absence of an historical linkage of Zoroaster to the Mosaic tradition, or even to the Bible, or vice versa, in most of the instances discussed, is conspicuous. Pico does not even care to account for his Kabbalistic interpretation of the sentences attributed by him to Zoroaster, namely the *Chaldaean Oracles*, and no explanation why Kabbalistic interpretations fit these statements is available in the *Conclusiones*.⁴² Interestingly enough, in his later *Heptaplus*, unilinear theories are nevertheless evident. In contrast to Ficino and Pico's reluctance to enroll Zoroaster in the line of the unilinear tradition of transmission, a more 'orthodox' approach was in existence in Ficino's lifetime in Italy. R. Elijah Hayyim ben Benjamin of Genazzano wrote, apparently as late as the last decade of the fifteenth century, as follows:

Behold, I have found in an ancient book attributed to a wise man called Zoroaster the following statement: metempsychosis was received by the Hindus from the Persians, and by the Persians from the Egyptians; by the Egyptians from the Chaldaeans, and by the Chaldaeans from Abraham. They expelled him from their land, since they hated him because he was saying that the soul is the source of movement and causes the movement of matter and there are many souls.⁴³

It is notable that the source of this Jewish Italian Kabbalist attempted to build up a unilinear tradition on the theory of metempsychosis which originates with Abraham; Zoroaster had only inherited it from the patriarch. The source for this tradition was, as the Kabbalist indicates, an 'old book'. Thus we may assume that a pre-Renaissance source proposed a unilinear tradition wherein Zoroaster was not the progenitor of the ancient wisdom but a disciple of the Mosaic lore. Indeed Abraham and Moses were mentioned here and the attribution

⁴¹ See Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter*, pp. 192–94, 198–99 and 241–44.

⁴² See Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, pp. 487–93.

⁴³ *Jeggeret Hamudot*, ed. A. W. Greenup, London, 1912, p. 13. On this passage, see Idel, 'Differing Conceptions of Kabbalah', pp. 158–59; Altmann, 'Beyond the Realm', pp. 80–81, and Goetschel, 'Elie Hayyim de Genazzano', p. 98, esp. n. 28.

of the Kabbalistic theory of metempsychosis to Abraham assumes that Kabbalah, which constitutes in the eyes of the Kabbalists the esoteric interpretation of Judaism, was already cultivated by the patriarch.⁴⁴ Such an assessment is corroborated by the image of Zoroaster as the student of Abraham already current in the Middle Ages as well as by another passage referring to Zoroaster in the same book of R. Elijah of Genazzano:

It is known that Abraham our forefather, blessed be his memory, was a great sage, even before the King of the kings of kings revealed to him limitless knowledge of astrology⁴⁵ and the natural sciences, as is found in the ancient books such as the Book of Worship [*Sefer ha-'Avodah*] and the Book of Zoroaster, which I have mentioned above, dealing with the debates he [Abraham] had with the Chaldaeans, even before the Divine Presence revealed itself to him.⁴⁶

Thus we learn again that Genazzano was acquainted with a book attributed to Zoroaster, where Abraham was mentioned. It seems that the underlying assumption must have been that Zoroaster learned something from Abraham about the natural sciences, a view that corroborates the conception that Zoroaster was well acquainted with the seven arts. The source of the Jewish Kabbalist was apparently known also to Ficino. In his *De Christiana religione* ch. 26, he quotes Alexander and Eupolemus, who both suppose that Abraham taught Zoroaster the astrology which he had learnt from the successors of Enoch.⁴⁷ This suggests that the Christian author, Ficino, was in possession of a tradition which placed Zoroaster in a unilinear tradition starting with Enoch and having Abraham as his direct mentor. Therefore, the portrayal of Zoroaster in Ficino's other 'pagan' lists of the genealogy of religious knowledge and philosophy may represent a deliberate choice not to include this figure in a continuous line with the Jewish tradition, but to allow, at least in most of his discussions, the existence of a separate, independent pagan line of transmission.

⁴⁴ *Iggeret Hamudot*, p. 12.

⁴⁵ Or astronomy, in Hebrew *Iztageninut*. On Abraham as the inventor of astronomy in a context where Zoroaster is also mentioned as living immediately after the patriarch, see Bidez and Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés*, II, p. 48.

⁴⁶ *Iggeret Hamudot*, pp. 53-54.

⁴⁷ Ficino, *De Christiana religione*, *Opera omnia*, p. 29. See Allen, *Synoptic Art*, p. 39, n. 81.

In the same chapter, just three lines earlier, in what is so far as I know the only other instance where a definite relationship between Zoroaster and the biblical tradition is mentioned, Ficino identifies Zoroaster, following Didymus's *Commentary on Genesis*, with Ham, the son of Noah, and notes that he is also called by the Hebrews Chanaan.⁴⁸ However, it should be emphasized that not only are these two references exceptional in Ficino's voluminous work; they are sharply distinguished from the numerous instances in his later writings, where he presents Zoroaster as the first in the chain of pagan philosophy. In the above two texts, he is only quoting the views of other authors.

Let me ponder the implication of the above analysis: the same tradition that connected Zoroaster with Abraham was in the possession of both Jews and Christians in the Renaissance period, as Ficino and Pico testify. However, Jewish authors were reticent about the figure of Zoroaster and did not allow him an independent status in relation to the Jewish tradition. Ficino and Pico did, in my opinion deliberately, take another position which is substantially different, thus allowing the emergence of the multilinear theory of the *prisca theologia*. The change of mind is conspicuous in the case of Ficino: whereas in his treatise *De Christiana religione* he was ready to heap up a variety of quotations from the Christian sources about the influence of biblical figures on the *prisci theologi*, in later commentaries on Plato he presented the ancient theologians as totally independent of biblical influence. It is possible that the reason for this change of mind is related to the subject matter of the different books; whereas *De Christiana religione* is much closer to the more common understanding of Christianity as based upon the classical patristic sources, the commentaries on Plato's dialogues and the *Theologia Platonica* are based more on pagan traditions, and accordingly they use the concepts related to the origins of the *prisca theologia* current among pagan philosophers. *De Christiana religione* marks Ficino's transformation from a pagan into a soldier of Christ.⁴⁹ It was certainly a temporary or superficial one, since in the very same years when he was working on this apology he wrote his other major treatise, the *Platonic Theology*, where he continues to subscribe to the impor-

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 31, n. 56, and 33-34.

⁴⁹ See Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, pp. 325-71.

tance of the pagan ancient theology.⁵⁰ Zoroaster is a figure who was rarely mentioned by later Jewish authors. The only Renaissance writers who seem to be concerned with him were an historian, Gedalyah ibn Yehiya, and a physician, Abraham Yagel; these late sixteenth-century authors quoted a similar passage, where Zoroaster was described as follows:

Ancient Zoroaster was the father of all the magicians, the first of them all to write and compose books on this craft. He was Ham, the son of Noah . . . in his wisdom he discovered the seven disciplines, wrote them on seven pillars of metal and on seven pillars of charred stone⁵¹ so that it would be a memorial of his great wisdom and understanding for the generations to come.⁵²

Most of the details of this text can be found in earlier sources; Ficino was, presumably, the source of the identification of Zoroaster as Ham and as the master of the magicians.⁵³ Thus both ibn Yehiya and Yagel reveal themselves as followers of a Christian tradition known in the Christian Renaissance and dealing with a unilinear theory. However, elsewhere it becomes obvious from the way Yagel described the ancient theologians, including Zoroaster, that a multilinear theory was also known and accepted by him:

For also the important sages among the gentiles never saw the lights of the Torah, nor of worship, prophecy, wonders and miracles . . . Listen to what these sages spoke about the creator. For the ancient sages saw the light of life.⁵⁴

This modest shift toward a multilinear theory among some Italian Jews is indeed symptomatic of spreading Christian influence at the

⁵⁰ See Marsilio Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne de l'immortalité des âmes*, VI.1, ed. and tr. by Raymond Marcel, 3 vols, Paris, 1964–70, I, p. 224.

⁵¹ The two pillars are related to the fact that there was a tradition about two kinds of flood, one of water and one of fire, and the sciences were engraved on the different materials in order to prevail during the two floods. On this theme see M. Idel, 'Hermeticism and Judaism', in *Hermeticism in the Renaissance*, ed. by I. Merkel and A. G. Debus, Washington, DC, and London, 1988, pp. 19–44, at p. 71, n. 13, and John Scarborough, 'Hermetic and Related Texts in Classical Antiquity', *ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵² See Yagel's *Beit Ya'ar ha-Levanon*, translated and discussed by Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science*, pp. 143, 146–47, and R. Gedalyah ibn Yehiya's *Shalshet ha-Qabbalah*, Jerusalem, 1962, p. 218.

⁵³ See a further passage from *De Christiana religione*, quoted and discussed by Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, pp. 741–42. On Zoroaster as Ham see Bidez and Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés*, II, pp. 49–50 and 54–55.

⁵⁴ *Beit Ya'ar ha-Levanon*, in Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science*, p. 146.

end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century. The thriving Christian Renaissance culture impinged much more strongly on the Jews in this period than it had a century earlier.⁵⁵ The shift in Christian Renaissance writings from the patristic unilinear to the multilinear theory, as exemplified above in Ficino's thought, reverberated some hundred years later in the scattered statements of Jewish intellectuals.

3. *Conclusions*

It should be mentioned that only the increasing status of Kabbalah in Italy, with its views similar to ancient Hellenistic modes of thought, made it possible for the two types of lore to be compared. The strengthening of the status of a substantial corpus of allegedly ancient Jewish mystical theology, and of the Jews themselves in Italy at the end of the fifteenth century, created a common phenomenological ground that allowed pagan views to be seen in a favourable light. Neoplatonic, Pythagorean and Hermetic material which was adopted by early and later Kabbalists, could create the assumption that the corpus newly translated by Ficino reflected themes already found in the ancient Jewish theology called Kabbalah.

What are the possible implications of the difference between the versions of the *prisca theologia* theory as adopted by some Jews in the Renaissance period in comparison to that of the Christians? Obviously, on the side of the Jewish authors it betrays a reticence about using the abundant literature translated by Ficino: the pagan philosophers cannot be considered as reliable sources in their works. The figures of Zoroaster, Orpheus and Hermes Trismegistus are only very rarely cited in the fifteenth and sixteenth-century Jewish works. It is only at the beginning of the seventeenth century that the influence of Ficino's translations become somewhat more visible in the writings of Abraham Yagel, Azariah de' Rossi, and Menasseh ben Israel; they alone were more comfortable quoting the names of the above mythical figures as theologians. To the extent that Ficino's translations influenced Jewish Renaissance thought, it was mainly via the intro-

⁵⁵ See Idel, 'Differing Conceptions of Kabbalah', pp. 140-41; Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science*, pp. 159-60.

duction of the Platonic and Neoplatonic corpora. We may better understand Jewish reticence on the syncretistic achievements of their Christian contemporaries if the non-conformist attitudes of Ficino, Pico or Bruno are put in relief. Indubitably, it was a matter of reluctance to embrace what was felt to be paganism that motivated the Jewish writers' reticence; this conclusion is corroborated by their similar reticence about pagan mythology which had become fashionable in the Christian Renaissance. As with Zoroaster, Orpheus or Hermes, there were some exceptions to this, but by and large they are the same persons who quoted the above figures. The only significant author who indulged in an allegorical interpretation of mythology, Leone Ebreo, offered his mythological allegories in a book written for a Christian audience, not in Hebrew. It may well be that his concern with mythology was one of the reasons why his famous book did not have the same resonance among Jews as it had among Christians.

Thus, the scarcity of the occurrence of pagan elements in Jewish literature in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is not to be attributed to the fact that they were unaware of Renaissance thought or to a basic limitation of their intellectual horizons. I assume that it was a protest, generally silent but sometimes explicit, stemming from the feeling that a surge of paganism was permeating the thought of their contemporary Christian compatriots. If we remember that some of the Renaissance authors, starting with Pico, coupled their interest in the pagan thought and literature with a missionary attitude towards the Jews, it becomes easier to understand why the appeal of some intellectual aspects of the Italian Renaissance was so small in the eyes of many of the Jewish authors, including Jews living in Italy. The different attitudes of Jews and Christians in general toward the past are partly due to the divergences between the Christian and Jewish Renaissance conceptions of the *prisca theologia*. The later appearance of the Christian saviour induced the search for prefiguration of his advent and deeds by way of decoding the Hebrew Bible. Such an attitude is absent in Judaism; this religion is, rhetorically at least, a relatively more self-contained culture from the very beginning. By contrast Christian theology was already accustomed to reinterpreting another sacred corpus, and the assumption of correspondences between the Old and New Testaments underpins both the ancient and the medieval Christian hermeneutic traditions. The Renaissance hypothesis that there are also other types of literature

which adumbrated some of the tenets of Christianity was important in order to accommodate the translation of pagan philosophical and religious texts and their commentaries by Ficino. These texts were given a status similar to that of the Jewish Scriptures as they too were envisioned as concurring in the same religious thought and constituting a *prisca religio Christiana*. The attribution of a certain status to pagan traditions was not totally absent in patristic literature, but the emphasis in the Renaissance was a new one. By separating the testimony of the pagans from that of the ancient Hebrews, the Christian principles of faith could only gain in authority by pointing to universal recognition. It is the culmination of events adumbrated not only by certain Hebrew prophecies, but by all ancient prophecies and philosophies in general. Jewish authors in the Renaissance integrated another corpus, the Kabbalistic literature, with its emphasis on its unique status as a source of esoteric knowledge. By opening the channels of information to a wider variety of sources, however, some exponents of the Christian Renaissance facilitated the emergence of unconventional manners of thought, and this promoted a certain amount of intellectual freedom. Within a few generations, this in turn facilitated the beginnings of modern science, while Jewish thinkers were still adhering to a unilinear theory of knowledge.

LIFE AS A DEAD PLATONIST

Michael J. B. Allen

Sic rerum series mundique revertitur aetas
Stattius, *Silvae*, I.2.187

It is a learned commonplace that the Renaissance humanists, inspired by poets, by the Stoics, by Cicero, by Polybius and other classical historians, and by *Ecclesiastes* 1:9, revived, or at least toyed with, the notion of a cyclical or repetitive time. The theme may speak variously: to our occasional uncanny sense of déjà vu; to the more familiar sense as we grow older that we have seen much if not all of it before (the consequence of our stock of memories increasing); to our historical sense of connectedness to the past, of being subject to its consequences; or to the philosophical supposition, deriving surely from our perceptions, true or false, of repetitions of various kinds, that time manifests patterns and configurations. For Ficino the most pregnant and familiar verses on the notion of repeated time were undoubtedly those of Virgil's fourth eclogue prophesying the greatness of the mysterious child, 'noble increment of Jove', and with him the rebirth of the golden age:

Ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas,
magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo.
iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna;
iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto.¹

Traditionally taken as a pagan prophecy of the coming of Christ, like Isaiah's famous verses in ch. 11:1–9, the eclogue also contains one of the most memorable formulations of the doctrine of eternal recurrence: 'With a new Tiphys at the helm, a second Argo will set out . . . even wars will repeat themselves, and the mighty Achilles be

¹ *Eclogues*, IV.4–7. For a survey and bibliography of Christian interpretations of this prophecy, see Pierre Courcelle, 'Les exégèses chrétiennes de la Quatrième Eclogue', *Revue des études anciennes*, 59 (1957), pp. 294–319. For the Renaissance, see also Vladimir Zabughin's older study, *Vergilio nel Rinascimento italiano da Dante a Torquato Tasso*, 2 vols, Bologna, 1921–23.

despatched to Troy once more.' Behind Virgil, however, loomed the great myths of time in Plato, surely Pythagorean in origin, and often ironically set apart from or juxtaposed with the philosophical concerns of their respective dialogues. One such myth Ficino found in the *Timaeus*, where time is described as the moving image of eternity (37D) and where the markers of time are the sun, moon and stars in their eternal dance (40C). He encountered another such myth in the *Statesman*, 268E–274D, where Plato presents us with a complex picture, not of repetition but of alternating times. The time of Saturn, the golden providential time when the motion of the heavens is from west to east, is succeeded by that of Jove, the fallen fatal time when the heavens move from east to west. Since the course of time is thus reversed, old men—and more generally the old world—return to their youth and pass from hoary age to babbling infancy. On the basis of passages in Proclus,² Ficino arrestingly argues that Jove is the cause of both the reversals in the myth and not just of the reversal that has produced the present fatal age. When the Saturnian 'shepherds' of time are born again, then 'the ends of the ages' will dawn with them, the *dies novissimi*. And yet these shepherds will come and transform the Jovian world—guide idyll into epic and epic into idyll—only at Jove's command. This command will coincide with Jove's decision to begin the cosmic cavalcade, in the *Phaedrus's* myth of the charioteer, back towards Saturnian contemplation: to release, if you will, Saturn from his captivity within the active Jovian soul. For Jove, not Saturn, holds the key to the inauguration of the golden age: from him comes the divine decision to reverse the disorder of an iron time, to spin the rotation of the world towards the east.³ For Jove, as an Orphic fragment declares, is the first, the last, the

² Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, V.6–7 and 25, ed. and tr. by H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink, 6 vols, Paris, 1968–97, V, pp. 24.22–26.20, 91.9–96.24.

³ See Ficino's epitome, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basel, 1576; repr. Turin, 1959 etc., pp. 1294–96; see also the analysis in my *Nuptial Arithmetic: Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on the Fatal Number in Book VIII of Plato's 'Republic'*, Berkeley etc., 1994, pp. 126–29. A comment in his *In Sophistam*, summa 22 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1287), glossing the *Sophist*, 242c4, suggests that Ficino associated the theory of alternating cycles with Empedocles. This notion awaits investigation. In his *Platonic Theology*, IV.2 (Ficino, *Platonic Theology, Volume I, Books I–IV*, English translation by M. J. B. Allen with J. Warden, Latin text edited by J. Hankins with W. Bowen, Cambridge, Mass., 2001, pp. 302–05), Ficino identifies these cycles with the Platonic Great Year, which he supposed to be 36,000 solar years.

head and the centre,⁴ and all things are created and provided for by him, including the intelligible time that is the image of eternity, even of Saturn's eternity.

Let us, however, turn to perhaps the greatest of all Platonic myths and one that haunted Ficino as it had haunted Plotinus and his followers. For it focuses our attention on the notion of man's descent into earthly time, into a momentary space, and it anticipates various themes expounded later in the *Timaeus* and notably the description at 41D ff. of the soul's descent and reascent. At the end of the tenth book of Plato's *Republic* at 614B ff., Socrates recounts to Glaucon the story of Er, the Pamphylian who had been slain in battle, returning twelve days later at the moment of his funeral to revivify his as yet undecayed corpse and with a story to tell. He had undergone a visionary journey into the beyond and seen the mysterious region where four paths or openings converged, ascending to and descending from heaven, and likewise to and from earth. This meadow (compare the reference at *Gorgias* 523E ff. to the meadow of judgement) was the concourse where the three great judges passed judgement on those ascending from earth 'full of squalor and dust', and assigned them either to Tartarus on the downward left-hand path or upward to heaven on the right. They also presided over 'the second procession of souls clean and pure' who appeared to have arrived after a long journey and gladly thronged to the meadow 'as at a festival' (614D-E). The two processions intermingled, acquaintances greeting and questioning one another and telling their stories, some lamenting and bewailing their dreadful sufferings which had lasted beneath the earth a thousand years (their tenfold penalty), others recounting the 'delights and visions of ineffable beauty' of their stay in heaven. On the eighth day, the two companies arose and journeyed for four more days to a spot where they saw a straight pillar of light, 'the girdle of the heavens' like a trireme's keel or 'swifter' (616B-C). From the extremities of this light stretched the spindle of Necessity and through it turned the orbits of the eight celestial spheres forming a nest of whorls upon each of whose rims sang a Siren uttering a single note, the notes of all eight constituting 'the concord of a single

⁴ Frag. 21/21a (ed. Kern). Ficino found it in Plato's *Laws*, IV, 715E, Ps.-Aristotle, *De mundo*, VII, 401a28-29, and Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, III.9.

harmony'. On attendant thrones sat Necessity's daughters, the three Fates, Lachesis singing of the past, Clotho of the present, and Atropos of things to come, each helping to spin the various whorls of the spindle.⁵

It is from the lap of Lachesis that the lots and patterns of particular lives are taken up by a prophet with the words: 'Now is the beginning of another cycle of mortal generation where birth is the beacon of death. No divinity shall cast lots for you, but you shall choose your own deity.' The patterns are far greater in number than the assembly and of every variety; and each soul selects a pattern when his allotted turn comes. The former soul of Orpheus, for instance, chooses the life of a swan, having been murdered by women and thus 'unwilling to be conceived and born of a woman'; while Thamyras's soul selects the life of a nightingale, Ajax's soul the life of a lion, Agamemnon's soul the life of an eagle, Atalanta's soul the life of an athlete, the soul of the buffoon Thersites the life of an ape, and the soul of the circumspect Odysseus, who had the last lot of all, the life of an ordinary citizen. Having selected their lives they were all marshalled before Lachesis who despatched each soul with a demon-genius, 'the guardian of his life and the fulfiller of his choice' (620D-E). Clotho then ratified the choice and thus the destiny of each soul, before Atropos made the web of this destiny irreversible.

Thence the soul and its genius with all the other souls journeyed across the treeless Plain of Oblivion in a terrible and stifling heat until they camped at eventide beside Lethe, the River of Forgetfulness, 'whose waters no vessel can contain'. They were then required to drink a measure of its water, though some wisely drank more sparingly than others. Directly they had drunk, 'they forgot all things' and fell asleep. In the middle of the night there was a peal of thunder and an earthquake and the souls 'were suddenly wafted thence, one this way, one that, upward to their birth like shooting stars' (621B). Er was forbidden to drink of the Lethean waters, yet could not recall how he had returned to his body, merely that he had seen himself at dawn lying on the funeral pyre.

In this famous dream story (echoed in part by the equally famous passage towards the end of the sixth book of the *Aeneid* when Aeneas

⁵ Cf. Plato, *Laws*, XII, 960c, with Ficino's commentary, *Opera omnia*, pp. 1524-25; cf. pp. 1636 (on Plotinus, *Enneads*, II.3.15), and 1705 (on *Enneads*, III.3.5). See also Plutarch, *De facie quae in orbe lunae apparet*, 945C-D.

encounters his father Anchises), Lethe and the subsequent sleep is the barrier between us and our antenatal existence which, given Plato's Pythagorean fascination with reincarnation and even with its most radical form metempsychosis, consists of countless previous lives in other 'cycles' and of the thousand-year penitential time atoning for sins committed during a cycle. Our little life, as Prospero says so memorably, 'is rounded with a sleep', not simply at the end of this life as the sleep of death, Hamlet's shuffling off 'this mortal coil', but even more mysteriously at the beginning of our life, the pre-birth sleep which cuts us off from the memory of our lives and of our choices before we are shot into this life like a meteor from the beyond.

Ficino followed the Neopythagoreans and Neoplatonists in supposing that this meteoric descent to earth took place in the constellation of Cancer, 'the portal of men'. Numenius, Porphyry and Macrobius,⁶ for instance, had described the soul's journey down through the eight celestial spheres and our acquisition of various gifts or attributes from the planets as we fell. In the descent and as a result of the choice we have made in the 'meadow' of the judges, we become especially subject to and therefore influenced by one of the planets and are born, as it were, its child, though every one of the planets influences us in varying degrees and ways. This is made possible because the soul is riding what Plato had imagined as a chariot or vehicle and what the ancients had identified as the spirit or *pneuma*, an envelope of originally aetherial, in the sense of fiery, material; a body, but as far removed as possible from our gross bodies of water and earth.⁷ As the soul descends, the spirit gradually becomes thicker and more water-laden until at last it loses its natural sphericity and is elongated and contorted to fit inside the body we inhabit here, imprisoned in the extended tomb of the flesh. In sleep this pneuma-vehicle can be released if we are sufficiently purged of passion and inwardly ready. Then we are able in dream-time to ride

⁶ Numenius apud Porphyrium, *De antro nympharum*, 10–11; Porphyry, *Sententiae*, ed. Lamberz, 29; Macrobius, *In Somnium Scipionis*, I.11–12; cf. Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.3.12 & 15. See Ficino's 1490 letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, later collected in his tenth book of *Letters (Opera omnia)*, p. 917), his *De amore*, VI.4 (Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, ed. and tr. by R. Marcel, Paris, 1956, p. 204), and his *Platonic Theology*, XVIII.5 (Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne de l'immortalité des âmes*, ed. and tr. by R. Marcel, 3 vols, Paris, 1964–70, III, p. 196).

⁷ *Enneads*, IV.3.15.

again on the journey through the spheres, this time in reverse, our chariot becoming lighter and more fiery the higher it ascends. If we are truly blessed, we eventually reach the rim of the celestial heavens and the outermost circumference of the sphere of the fixed stars, thence to gaze up at the intelligible Ideas, at the world we had known before this birth.⁸

But this entails somehow unsipping the cup of Lethean waters and entering into the past: leaving our waking world and falling into the sleep that takes us through sleep back into another waking world, the knowledge of which apprises us that our world here is truly the realm of sleep. These pregnant paradoxes necessarily attend the Platonic inversion of so-called normal values. That we can return to an earlier waking world is the corollary implied by *Meno*, 81B–85D, with its curious story of the boy who demonstrated some flair in geometry and which leads Socrates to define recollection as ‘the spontaneous recovery of knowledge’ (85D).⁹ It involves, obviously, the notion of entry into life here as into a sleep in which occasionally we have intimatory dreams, dreams that contain memories of the life there. In the *Phaedo*, 70c ff., Socrates gets Cebes to admit that we come into this world and its life from the world of the dead, the other world, and that ‘the souls of the dead must exist in some place from which they are reborn’ (72A), going around ‘in a sort of cycle’ that has birth and death alike function as the twin doors of generation in ‘constant correspondence’ with each other.¹⁰ Thus waking up is balanced by falling asleep even as the two conditions are equivocally defined like objects seen in parallax. Hence, argues Socrates, learning is really recollection (72E), and such recollected learning testifies that we are immortal. Moreover, as we rediscover our own former knowledge of the absolute realities such as Beauty and Goodness, we can refer objects we perceive in the physical world to them as to ‘their patterns’ (76D–E). At this point both Simmias and Cebes are convinced that Socrates has proved that our antenatal existence stands or falls on the reality of the absolute Ideas as exist-

⁸ Cf. *Phaedrus*, 247A–c, with Ficino’s commentary *In Phaedrum*, 11 (ed. and tr. by M. J. B. Allen, *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer*, Berkeley etc., 1981, pp. 126–29, with analysis in *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of his ‘Phaedrus’ Commentary, its Sources and Genesis*, Berkeley etc., 1984, pp. 151–56).

⁹ Cf. Ficino’s *Meno* epitome, *Opera*, pp. 1132–33.

¹⁰ Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 248c ff., *Timaeus*, 41E ff., 90E ff., *Laws*, X, 903D–905A. See A. N. M. Rich, ‘Reincarnation in Plotinus’, *Mnemosyne*, ser. 4, 10 (1957), pp. 232–38.

ing 'in the fullest possible sense', though Cebes remains to be convinced that such reasoning can prove our existence after death (77E). By combining the *Phaedo's* arguments with the *Republic's* myth of Er, Ficino arrived at Plato's visionary sense of the sleep encompassing our earthly lives and of those moments of recollection—so poignantly central to the autobiographical poetry of Wordsworth—which give us intimations of the immortality which is ours.¹¹

The Er myth took him further than the *Phaedo*, however, in its critique of life as a sleep shot through with the occasional dream. For it depicts the good souls arriving at the meadow where their fates are woven into the world-spindle by Necessity and presents them as eager to descend into the earthly life and thus to enter the realm of sleep, forgetfulness and sorrow, even if redeemed at times by transient truth-telling dreams. Plato never explains the grounds of their eagerness to descend (in *Aeneid*, VI.749 ff., similarly, Anchises merely remarks that, having drunk of Lethe, the purged Elysian souls 'begin to want to be returned to bodies'); but in the *Phaedo* he has emphasized, as we have seen, the notion of cyclicity, of a kind of need to balance life and death.¹² It is as if the souls descended from heaven to earth because it is their time to offset the return of the earth-worn souls. The heaven-nurtured souls long to sleep, the earth-worn to awake. Here the emphasis is not on the ethical issue as it affects the individual soul, where clearly, given other Platonic criteria, our duty and our bliss is always to return home, to fly back towards Capricorn, 'the portal of the gods', in the moment of liberation from earthly desire, from the prison-house of the body and its passions.¹³ Rather, Plato seems to be for a time abandoning the Socratic goal of enlightenment and purgation for an epic mythological vision of the process of cosmic change and renewal, for the alternating cycles of gain and loss, of emanation and return, of life into death and death into life, of God-desire and world-desire that is almost Hindu in its sweep and starkly opposed to the world-denying ethos we associate not only with medieval Christianity but with a number of classical philosophies that emphasize life as illusory or unreal: Buddhism, Pythagoreanism, Mithraism.

In this myth, as in the *Aeneid's* echo of it, the mystery attends

¹¹ Cf. Ficino's *Phaedo* epitome, *Opera omnia*, pp. 1390–95.

¹² Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.3.27.

¹³ *Platonic Theology*, XVIII.5 (ed. Marcel, III, pp. 196–97); see n. 5 above.

upon those who descend from heaven. It is obvious why we should wish to escape from a 'muddy vesture of decay', from the 'mortal coil' of Hamlet's great meditation. But why are the heaven-bathed souls consumed by the yearning to sleep, to embrace the narcotic, papaverous hymns of Orpheus to Night and Sleep, to leave being for becoming? It is in a way a yearning not so much for death as for otherness, for the other kind of life, the other kind of wakefulness that is ours, the dream life that renders our waking lives before Lethe a fitful dream, an occasional intimation of our being before we sipped from the bowl of becoming. Plato, of course, finds it difficult to abandon the traditional strictures, but the orientation of his great myth is validating what he had elsewhere condemned as the shadows on the walls of the cave. It is compelling us to accept our illusions in the life here as necessarily part of the cosmic balance, as the counterpart of the life there, and thus as intrinsic to the succession of cycles. It speaks to the necessity of falling into sleep and dream, of entering into a realm other than the waking one; but where waking and sleeping are in a kind of dialectical exchange. Wherever we are seems for the moment to be the waking life, elsewhere the life of dream; but every so often we have intimations, Wordsworth's 'fallings from us, vanishings', that the opposite is true. As amphibians we thus dwell in two realms; and we do not escape the one when we pass to the other, since ours is a twofold destiny while the succession of the ages endures. The result is the confounding, or at least the complicating, of the opposition between being and becoming which Ficino was to engage in his analysis of the *Sophist*.¹⁴

In his influential dialogue *De facie quae in orbe lunae apparet*, 28, 943A ff., Plutarch maintains that man is composed of three elements: intellect, soul and body, the intellect being superior to the soul to the degree that the soul is superior to the body. In the formation of man, the Earth supplies the body, the Moon the soul, and the Sun the intellect. Correspondingly, in man's dissolution—of which sleep is a premonition—we undergo two successive 'deaths', the first on Earth when Demeter violently unlooses the soul and intellect from

¹⁴ In *Sophistam*, summae 16–40 (ed. and tr. by M. J. B. Allen, *Icastes: Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's 'Sophist'*, Berkeley etc., 1989, pp. 228–67, with analysis, pp. 49–82).

the body, the second on the Moon when Persephone 'gently and by slow degrees' unlooses the intellect from the soul. Plutarch then describes the nature of the Moon, its eclipses and their effect on disembodied souls and outlines his eschatology (30, 943c ff.), situating 'the meadows of Hades' between the Earth and the Moon.¹⁵ The soul having left its body comes to wander for a while in these meadows like an exile returning to its homeland: it is purged of any stain derived from the body's pollution until it savors the 'confused' joy of an initiate (*ibid.*). Attracted by the Sun, the sun-like intellect then hurries to separate itself from the moon-like soul, abandons it, and hastens along the deep passage right through to the other, heavenward side of the Moon, to the 'Elysian plain' (944c–e), thence to depart for the Sun. Left on the Moon meanwhile, deserted and alone, the soul, like a wraith or shade, retains for a time 'the traces and dreams of life'.¹⁶ Plutarch then cites from Book XI of the *Odyssey*, both line 222, 'Soul like a dream has taken wing and sped', and lines 601–02, 'Thereafter marked I mighty Heracles | His shade; but he is with the deathless gods' (944f).¹⁷ Eventually, the souls of the temperate who were devoted to the philosophical life blanch for lack of interest in anything on the Moon and 'wither quietly away', while the souls of the ambitious, striving and irascible either 'as in a sleep full of dreams pass the time in reliving the memories of their life', like Endymion (945a–b)—a memory surely of the *Phaedo's* reference to Endymion at 72c—or they try to descend again to Earth, apparently from the earthward-facing side known as 'the house of counter-terrestrial Persephone', the departure point for souls on their way to rebirth in bodies (944c).¹⁸

In many obvious ways unorthodox, for Ficino Plutarch's eschatology is nevertheless Platonic and based fleetingly on the references in the *Timaeus* 42d, 61c and 69c–d to the soul's 'mortal part', and more sustainedly on the *Republic's* myth of Er, even if it introduced

¹⁵ On these 'meadows', cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Phaedrum*, ed. Couvreur, p. 161.3–9, a commentary Ficino had worked through and translated early in his career. Proclus's comments in his *In Rempublicam*, ed. Kroll, II.132.20–133.15, were unknown to Ficino, however, since he and his contemporaries did not possess Proclus's last five treatises (the texts in Kroll's second volume). In his *De Iside*, 382e, Plutarch identifies Hades himself with Osiris.

¹⁶ 'οἷον ἴχνη τινὰ βίου καὶ ὀνειράτα διαφυλάττουσα' (944f).

¹⁷ Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.3.27; see below.

¹⁸ Cf. Plato, *Phaedo*, 81b–e, 108a–b. The notes of Harold Cherniss to his Loeb edition and translation of *De facie* are invaluable (*Moralia*, vol. 12).

additional problems into oneirology.¹⁹ Even Plutarch's tripartition of man he deemed an authentic Platonic theme, given that the ultimate bliss for man is to become a pure intellect (the definition for a Christian Platonist of an angel) and more particularly given that, following Plotinus and Origen, he thinks of human souls as minds 'that have somehow lapsed from their purity' and whose aethereal bodies 'are adapted to the different figures and constellations of the sky'.²⁰ More problematic is the notion of the soul's 'death' on the Moon, its becoming a wraith without its intellect, a dreaming Endymion, its sleep full of fleeting memories and dreams. Ficino followed the later Platonists in interpreting this Plutarchan death as signifying the separation of the *pneuma* from the soul, which he saw as essentially intellectual. That the soul's spiritous vehicle is abandoned on the Moon was a view opposed, however, by those who argued that the soul takes its vehicle, its aethereal envelope, to the very rim of the intellectual heaven and even beyond.²¹

If the myth of the cave articulates Plato's ethical disapproval of sleep and dreams as the condition of our fallen, fleeting, corporeal life, the myth of Er points to sleep and the dream as something more refined, as the point of entry into our other life, as the condition of our material-intelligible, our amphibian state; to our being the children of the cycle presided over by Necessity, mother of the Fates. And this leads us to the familiar notion of a great myth as something which escapes the control, certainly the intentions, of its author, like Mercutio or Sancho Panza or Falstaff or Frankenstein or King Kong. In Plato's case it presented Ficino with an alternative vision to the customary one. For the entry into becoming becomes (if we may phrase it paradoxically) the balancing counterpart to the entry into being, as sleep to waking. Viewed together the two constitute the being of becoming, the becoming of being, the motion and the stillness of Donatello's dancing rioters in his *Cantoria*. Michelangelo's Night may defy our sense of the female bust and its

¹⁹ See F. Cumont's comments in his *Lux Perpetua*, Paris, 1949, pp. 189–91. The journal *Accademia. Revue de la Société Marsile Ficino*, 1 (1999), includes some interesting articles on Ficino and dream theory.

²⁰ *Platonic Theology*, IX.5 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 41).

²¹ Pertinent here is a verse Ficino often adduces from the *Chaldaean Oracles*, for instance, in the *Platonic Theology*, XVIII.4 (ed. Marcel, III, p. 194): 'there is a place too for the idol in the clear region' (ed. des Places, frag. 158). Like others he assumed these *Oracles* were Zoroaster's.

date is too late for Ficino, but it is nonetheless an extraordinarily powerful Ficinian depiction of a mighty goddess, the sister of Day, lying with her owl, her cushion of poppies, her mask of the sculptor himself, in the meditation of sleep and dream. For she is the Platonic intellect in soul; and as such she is oblivious of this world of tombs, however Medicean, draped on a sarcophagus of the dead man, the physical man, and locked into the visions within. For Platonism, like Christianity, is centred on paradoxes, on a sense of this life and our condition in it as fundamentally paradoxical, as a Herculean struggle for tranquillity. At the same time the way through the paradoxes is set out in the Er myth in terms of our submission to, even our eager participation in, alternation. Commitment to such alternation, to a theory of returns, cycles, re-enactments, necessarily transforms the ethical valencies of such core notions as death, night, sleep, descent, incorporation into matter, being timebound and limited in space. For they become markers only for the circling chariots; stages in the cycle of reincarnation; diastolic states that correspond to the systolic ones of life, day, wakefulness, ascent, liberation from matter, from time, from space; the house of Cancer at the other end of the zodiac from the house of Capricorn; the Heraclitan moment that balances the laughing Democritus.

What then of the Plutarchan reference to the 'shade' or image (*eidolon*) of the Homeric Heracles, the active man for Ficino *par excellence*?²² The famous lines occur in the *Nekyia*, the descent into hell, in the *Odyssey*, XI.601–04: 'After Sisyphus I saw the Heracleian might, its idol or reflection; for as to Heracles himself, in the midst of the immortal gods, he rejoices at their feasts and possesses the beautiful ankle-slim Hebe, a child of great Zeus and of Hera of the golden sandals.' Why would the ghost or idol of Heracles haunt the abode of the dead when the real hero was on Olympus? For Plutarch the idol was the abandoned soul, while the feasting Hebe-accompanied Heracles was the intellect. And yet to Ficino, the Plotinian, the

²² For the Neoplatonic Heracles in general, see J. Pépin, 'Héraclès et son reflet dans le Néoplatonisme', in *Le Néoplatonisme. Actes du Colloque international, Royaumont, 9–13 juin 1969*, ed. by P. M. Schuhl and P. Hadot, Paris, 1971, pp. 167–99. For Ficino's Hercules, see M. J. B. Allen, 'Homo ad Zodiacum: Marsilio Ficino and the Boethian Hercules', in *Forma e parola. Studi in memoria di Fredi Chiappelli*, ed. by D. J. Dutschke et al., Rome, 1992, pp. 205–21, repr. in my *Plato's Third Eye: Studies in Marsilio Ficino's Metaphysics and its Sources*, Aldershot, 1995.

mystery was more subtle still, given that the Moon itself is an idol or image of the Sun and also, as Plutarch had suggested at 945A, the 'stuff' or 'element' of the soul as an image or shade, and given too that Clotho is the Fate associated with the Moon. Plotinus refers to the *Odyssey's* lines, albeit mostly indirectly, in three passages. In VI.4.16 he is attempting to retain what he can of the traditional eschatological myths. If the soul is not bad, then why punishment in Hades? The soul never descends into the body but projects onto it its reflection. Thus for Plotinus 'to go down into Hades' signifies two distinct things. If Hades signifies the invisible, it means that the soul separates itself from the body. If Hades is a place below, it means that she is either with the body or if the body is no more, then the soul's reflection is in Hades, while the soul itself remains in the intelligible world.²³ The same line of argument appears in I.1.12 where the *eidolon* is called a second soul and we are told additionally that since the hero lived the life of action, 'something of him remained below', whereas if he had been a contemplative his whole soul would have been in the intelligible world.²⁴

In IV.3.27, however, Plotinus turns to the problem of memory. To which, soul or soul-image, does memory belong? To both is the answer, though some memories they share. The shade of Heracles remembers all the actions accomplished in life. The soul liberated from the body, the true Heracles, remembers the memories it had forgotten of its former lives (IV.3.27.14–24) even as it progressively forgets its life here below (IV.3.32.13). Plotinus thus makes Heracles the symbol of the soul's deliverance,²⁵ the *eidolon* being the imprint on the *pneuma* projected by the imagination, an *umbra*, *simulacrum* or *imago*.²⁶ For even gods by apotheosis have such simulacra; and for

²³ See Ficino's interesting comments ad loc. in his *In Plotinum, Opera omnia*, p. 1782: 'Idolum animae intellige vitale spiraculum animae circa corpus quod in nobis est geminum: alterum quidem ab anima nostra, alterum ab anima mundi. Nostrum quidem ab anima nostra separari non potest, sed ab affectu vacare; mundanum vero ab anima nostra segregari potest.'

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1554: 'vitam hanc, quae est et actus et imago quaedam animae, quando hinc abit anima, non perire quantum est actus animae, sed desinere ulterius imaginem esse, perinde ac si a vultu imago fiat in speculo atque discedente vultu restet quidem actus quidam in vultu vigorque emicans imaginis efficax sed non restat imago.'

²⁵ Cf. Synesius, *De somniis*, 8; Olympiodorus, *In Phaedonem*, ed. Norvin, p. 111.22–23. Ficino's comments here at *Opera omnia*, p. 1740, are minimal.

²⁶ The *imago* is 'a corporeal but intangible form like the wind', writes Servius,

Plotinus and then Proclus, Heracles's infernal *eidolon* is to Heracles himself in heaven as appearance is to reality.²⁷

If we return to the contradiction between the philosophy of ascent into the eternal world of the Ideas and escape on the one hand, and to the imaginative, mytho-poetic recognition of alternation and cycle on the other, then the heavenly Heracles emerges as the Platonic symbol of the ascended hero, and his stellification as the symbol of his attainment of intelligible changelessness, eternal identity; as his translation even into the Platonic Idea of man. But his shade or idol in Hades points to an alternative vision where there are two Heracles, two kinds of man, the waking man and the dream man, the one on his Olympian couch, the other a simulacrum. But each can substitute for the other. For our realm is the realm of duplication, of alternating waking and sleep. If Plotinus's story implies that after apotheosis Heracles's idol was rendered vain, it is because it is the story of a god. But for us who are not yet gods and remain subject to Clotho and the Moon, who have not yet summoned up the strength of Heracles to merit the reward of apotheosis and who are tied to the recurrent deaths that attend becoming in the cycles of time, the story suggests something different. Heracles escaped his idol, but we are in perpetual danger of returning to our idols, becoming our dreams again. For the sleep life in the meadows of Hades is necessarily ours, a necessary chapter in the story of our millennial travelling between Cancer and Capricorn. Moreover, whereas the Homeric vision suggests that Hades is the place of unreal shades, Plato's own philosophy complicates the vision by underscoring the shadowy nature of this life before Hades. We are all still idols, images of images, *somnia somniorum*, caught in the web of appearance, discovering that even death is unreal and longing as babes to return to the unreality of life, waking to sleep, sleeping to wake, and crying like Caliban to sleep again, a thousand twangling instruments about our ears.

glossing the famous line 'et nunc magna mei sub terras ibit imago' (*Aeneid*, IV.654). Cf. Porphyry, *Sententiae*, ed. Lamberz, 29.1-3.

²⁷ Proclus, *In Rempublicam*, ed. Kroll, I.119.23-120.12, presents us with a quaternary: body-*eidolon*-soul-intellect, while I.120.22 ff. and 172.9 ff. deal with the shade of Heracles. Ficino certainly knew these passages, but only in 1492 after Janus Lascaris had purchased a manuscript of the first twelve treatises of Proclus's *In Rempublicam* in Greece for Lorenzo de' Medici's library (now Florence, MS Laur. 80, 9). See Sebastiano Gentile's entry in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone: Mostra di manoscritti, stampe e documenti, 17 maggio-16 giugno 1984*, Florence, 1984, pp. 151-52.

And one final Neoplatonic chord. The World-Soul of the *Timaeus*, which Ficino and the Neoplatonists interpreted as the soul of the all, was also attributed an idol.²⁸ This image it projected onto the World-Body as onto a mirror²⁹ and the resulting reflection was Dionysus³⁰ with his train of drunken Sileni and satyrs and circling leopards and the wild maenads who troubled Euripides. This is not the occasion to explore this orgiastic topic, but it does point to the idea that the world itself is projected as onto a dream, that there is an idol of the soul of the all. That this idol is not the god Hades but the god of ecstasy and rebirth, the twice-born, the lover of Ariadne, mistress of the thread that unlocked the secrets of the Minoan labyrinth, again points to a more festive, a more celebratory vision of the earth and of our dreams upon it than Plato's initially dualistic system might seem to allow. For haunting this founding father of Greek rationalism, and haunting I believe his great Florentine disciple, is a bacchanalian yet monistic vision of the oneness of an intricate, perpetually varying dance, like the dance of the stars themselves in the *Timaeus*, 40c and the *Epinomis*, 982E.³¹ For the world itself we inhabit is the twice-born Dionysus, is a divine soul and the drunken idol of that soul, a dream and a dream within the dream, a god as powerful as Apollo, lord of wakefulness, an Endymion whom Selene keeps for her own. The whole notion of philosophy as an awakening is an integral part of the Platonic ethos, as is the image of Socrates as the exemplary questioner who continues the debate throughout the night of the *Symposium* while all the others nod off in various degrees of drunkenness and who emerges alone to do duty to the morning. But it is only half the story. For Plato had other gods to honor besides the Apollo of the day: Hermes the winged

²⁸ See Ficino's commentary in n. 23 above.

²⁹ The Neoplatonists were intrigued by the *Republic's* allusion at 596D-E to a mirror's recreation of the world, and Ficino took up the notion of a mirror magic in his commentary on the *Sophist*; see my *Iceastes*, chap. 5, and Kodera's article in this collection.

³⁰ Ficino has an important analysis of the nine Orphic Bacchoi and their accompanying Muses in his *Platonic Theology*, IV.1 (ed. Allen and Hankins, pp. 294-95); see also his dedicatory epistle of the *De vita* (*Opera omnia*, p. 493). See Luc Brisson's fascinating exploration of the Orphic-Proclan Dionysus in his 'Proclus et l'Orphisme', in *Proclus: Lecteur et interprète des anciens. Actes du Colloque International du CNRS Paris, 2-4 octobre, 1985*, ed. by Jean Pépin and H. D. Saffrey, Paris, 1987, pp. 43-104, at pp. 66-69, 84.

³¹ James Miller, *Measures of Wisdom: The Cosmic Dance in Classical and Christian Antiquity*, Toronto, 1986, is especially insightful.

interpreter and psychopomp, Dionysus lord of the nocturnal dance, Cronos dethroned king of melancholy, papaverous Hypnos brother of Thanatos. And he had another vision to convey that was less Socratic, more Orphic in that it recalls the enchantment of beast and tree, more Pythagorean assuredly in that it recalls our many reincarnations as a swan, a cock, Agamemnon's lion, Thersites's ape, the successive moulds of our lives as sleeping animals-men-spirits-intellec-t. For even in death we struggle in the *hypnomachia* which is the condition of all things wrought by the Platonic demiurge as he mixed soul and body in the *krater*, the cup of creation from whose brim it almost seems we sipped of Lethe, of the lotus, of the hemlock even, from the very beginning.

But these Platonic notions of the soul's pre-existence, of palingenesis, of recollection, of cyclical time, have always provoked Christian opposition, in Ficino's day from George of Trebizond and even Bessarion.³² In antiquity, however, it had been Augustine, one of Ficino's most revered authorities. In *Confessions*, Book XI the saint denies the objective nature of time (§27), affirming the past is composed of human memories, the future of human expectations (§28), his stated aim being to demonstrate that it is meaningless to inquire into what God was doing prior to the creation (§§10–13, 30). In the *City of God*, XII.12, 14, 18, 20–21, however, he launches into a sustained attack on the idea that the world is subject to 'an infinite series of dissolutions and restorations at fixed periods in the course of ages' (XII.12) and thus to 'periodic cycles . . . [which] may take place in one continuing world, or it may be that at certain periods the world disappears and reappears, showing the same features, which appear as new, but which in fact have been in the past and will return in the future. And the proponents of this theory are utterly unable to rescue the immortal soul from this merry-go-round, when it has attained wisdom; it must proceed on an unremitting alternation between false bliss and genuine misery' (XII.14). 'Heaven forbid', he continues, having cited as an example of such recurrence 'the same Plato, the same city, the same school, the same disciples

³² Bessarion, *In Calumniatorem Platonis*, II.3 and 8, in L. Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsmann*, 3 vols, Paderborn, 1923–42, II, pp. 83 ff., 147, 151–53. See James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Leiden, 1990, pp. 235, 257–59.

having appeared time after time', 'that we should believe this. For Christ died once for our sins and "being raised from the dead dies no more . . ." [Romans 6:9]'. Sardonicly Augustine then cites the Septuagint version of Psalm 12:9 that 'The ungodly walk in a circle', glossing 'in a circle' to signify 'not because their life is going to come round again in the course of those revolutions which they believe in, but because the way of their error, the way of false doctrine, goes round in circles' (XII.14). He pours scorn on the idea that 'God may be able to know his own works by means of those finite cycles with their continual departure and return' (XII.21), and he is troubled by what he sees as the psychological consequences of holding such an idea: namely, that 'our bliss will always be blighted by the knowledge that we have to return to misery and that this alternation is endless'. Interestingly, he lauds Porphyry the Platonist for refusing to follow Platonic orthodoxy in this matter and for rejecting 'the incessant and alternate comings and goings of souls' (XII.21).³³

Augustine was confronting the widespread and deeply held belief of the natural scientists, the Stoics, and even more importantly the Platonists, about the cyclical nature of time. If he found this theory repellent for psychological reasons and absurd in its consequences if taken literally—the same Plato, the same students, the same Argo, the same Achilles—he found it totally unacceptable on intellectual grounds as contrary to what he believed was the linearity and uniqueness of history and of Christ's incarnation in that history. On this fundamental issue Ficino differed from Augustine, though indebted to him in so many other ways.³⁴ One reason for this must have been

³³ See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Mystery of Continuity: Time and History, Memory and Eternity in the Thought of Saint Augustine*, Charlottesville, Va., 1986; also J. G. Christo, *Looking for God in Time and Memory: Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Augustine's Confessions*, Lanham, Md., 1991; Richard James Severson, *Time, Death, and Eternity: Reflecting on Augustine's Confessions in Light of Heidegger's 'Being and Time'*, Lanham, Md., 1995; and Roland J. Teske, *Paradoxes of Time in Saint Augustine*, Milwaukee, Wis., 1996. Of especial interest for the Renaissance are Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time*, Cambridge, Mass., 1972, and the papers in *Time: The Greatest Innovator. Timekeeping and Time Consciousness in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Rachel Doggett et al., Washington, DC, 1986.

³⁴ He used the title of one of Augustine's early Platonizing treatises, *De immortalitate animae*, as the subtitle of his *Platonic Theology* and quoted from it extensively at the end of his fifth book. Elsewhere he quoted from other works. A full-scale study of his debts to Augustine has yet to be written, but see Raymond Marcel, *Marsile Ficin (1433–1499)*, Paris, 1958, pp. 645, 674–75, and A. Tarabochia Canavero, 'S. Agostino nella Teologia Platonica di Marsilio Ficino', *Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica*, 70 (1978), pp. 626–46, with further references.

his commitment to the truth of the myths, when rightly interpreted, in Plato's dialogues—pre-eminently the two we have just considered which propound the theory of world cycles. Moreover, as a humanist, whose studies had been nurtured on Virgil and Ovid, Livy and Polybius, he must have been attracted like many of his peers to the theory of repetitive time while still committed to the notion of the end of time and the Last Judgement. For the theory of world cycles is not in itself unreconcilable with the theory that some virtuous souls inflamed by love of the divine can escape from the world and thus from cyclical return into the body, manumitted at last from the periodic concourse in the 'meadows' witnessed by the Pamphylian seer. For Platonism, like Buddhism, posits a liberation for the enlightened one from the revolving wheel of becoming; and so does its parent Pythagoreanism, *mutatis mutandis*. The philosopher sage leaves behind the shadowy illusions of becoming and steps forward into the blinding sunlight of being, even if the world itself is forever tied to becoming.

Augustine's account, however, is almost a caricature. It suggests, mockingly, a brief periodic cycle—perhaps even just a few hundred years—when events actually recorded in history will return and be recognized: the same Plato, the same city. By contrast, Ficino recognized that Plato had in mind a much vaster time scale that precluded anyone knowing, except possibly a divinely inspired prophet, that repetition has begun. Even if there is a finite number of cycles, that finitude is immense in the literal sense of immeasurable, and Plato, he believed, had pointed to the mystery of that vast finitude in his enigmatic reference to the fatal number in Book VIII of the *Republic*.³⁵ On the brink of the cosmological revolution and the discovery of the New World, Ficino's Platonic revival had as one of its results, therefore, the effect of rendering Augustine's time too constrictively, because too humanly and historically, conceived. It is not, incidentally, that he is siding with Augustine's foes or with any of the ancient proponents of temporal cycles, but rather that he is reviving Plato as the philosopher of cosmic and not merely of earthly or anthropocentric time, and thus as the architect of a qualitatively different order of thinking about time, duration and change. Even though the ancient theory of cycles is reconcilable in Ficino's mind with a linear universal chronology which will ultimately end, along with temporality itself, with the Day of Judgement, as Augustine had

³⁵ See my *Nuptial Arithmetic*, ch. 4.

so fervently argued—and one thinks of Ptolemy's epicyclical model—nonetheless that day is immeasurably far away, beyond human computation, if not comprehension. From our confined historical perspective we can only see alternation and recurrence stretching endlessly away in front of us and behind us. But God's time is itself an image of His eternity, a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past.

The situation is, in sum, complex. Ficino's revival of Platonic cyclicalism ran intellectually counter to, but did not in reality confront, let alone mitigate, the revivalist, millenarian fervor which gave birth to Savonarola, a medieval man trapped in the narrow confines of medieval time and under his Dominican habit an Augustinian friar, whom even Ficino had listened to for a few seasons in the early 1490s. But it was the humanists' toying with the antique belief in cycles and even more his own encounter with Plato's sense of time's vastness and near eternity which enabled Ficino, and after him Bruno, Patrizi, and others, to leap-frog over Augustine's portrait of a dramatically foreshortened man-centered time focused on the vanishing point of imminent conversion. On the threshold of the modern world, he was propelled by his study of Plato and the Platonists to come to terms with a new if not yet a modern order of temporality.

Although the astrophysicists have now established with remarkable detail and assurance the life cycles of various orders of stars, star clusters and galaxies, we still subscribe, perhaps atavistically, to the second law of thermodynamics and to the notion that our space and hence our time will eventually end. Augustine argued that to acknowledge and thus to recognize temporal cycles would make us unhappy, indeed lead us to despair of ever attaining redemption. But the inapprehensible magnitude of the space and time of the universe we now perceive also daunts us, mathematically, ethically, psychologically. In this regard we are living in a very different universe from that of the late ancient or medieval Christian, for whom the stars were ever-guiding, ever-influencing presences (whether benevolently or malevolently), and for whom both heaven and hell, Elysium and Hades, were comparatively near and imminent, apprehensible in time and space, visible even to those who were enraptured in dream and trance. The macrocosm no longer corresponds to, and therefore is no longer proportionable to or interpretable by, our microcosmic selves.³⁶

³⁶ Even so, Ficino was still drawn to the notion, much discussed by the scholastics,

For all his many debts to scholasticism, Ficino emerges as an early modern thinker. Though steeped in Augustine's works, he was able to draw on Plato, Plotinus, and even Proclus to liberate himself from some of the confines of Augustine's cosmology and history, and thus from the constrictions of an ancient Christian world chronology that was receding into the past as the desire for other orders of magnitude intensified. If the telescope and microscope alike aimed to satisfy this desire at the observational level, the new paradigms voiced by Ficino, and after him by Bruno and others, spoke to a new metaphysical pathos that accompanied the gradual turning away from the medieval sense of scale towards the recognition of the vastness of time and space and thus eventually of an infinitistic cosmology. Ironically, this emerging 'infinitism' was to destroy the anthropocentric values of the humanistic world from which it had arisen and to posit a quite different sense of the human condition in an immeasurably vast space-time continuum. Ironically, too, it was to postpone indefinitely the millenarian expectations of Renaissance and Reformation Christians and make the Savonarolan notion of Christ's Second Coming curiously dated, the product of a naïve sense of time's imminence, of its being chopped up and calibrated, as it were, to the length of a human life, to the duration of man's institutions, to the rise and fall and destiny of a limited succession of peoples, the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Goths, the Franks, and for us now the Texans.

Wedded though he inevitably was to many of the old ways of thinking about time, is it too much to suggest that Ficino's meditation on Plato and the 'last age of the Cumaean song' was a reaching out, however somnambulistically, for the light-years, with their nanoseconds, of the sibylline visions of modern astronomers? In any event, I would argue that Ficino's re-engagement with Plato's notions of cyclical time, and especially those in the last book of the *Republic*, have important cosmological implications. Simultaneously it was also a re-engagement with the ancient if heretical suspicion that we are not simply creatures who must be born again, but that we have been and are still unfolding as Platonic men and women, continually living in the Ideas and reliving in their images in a kind of Heracleian

of *adaequatio*, of there being a matching, even an equating, of man and cosmos; see his *Platonic Theology*, VIII.4.

life in death. Even as he set against this the Christian hope of final redemption, the shade of this ever-during Plotinian Heracles is in many ways an unquiet shade, like the lost Creusa, an *infelix simulacrum*.³⁷ It certainly underscores some of the problematic aspects, perhaps inevitably so, of Ficino's attempt to reconcile Platonism and Christianity.

³⁷ *Aeneid*, II.772.

MARSILIO FICINO AND THE PLATO-ARISTOTLE CONTROVERSY

John Monfasani

The Plato-Aristotle Controversy of the Renaissance was a unique moment in the history of philosophy.¹ At no time before or since has philosophy been seen as a bipolar world split between Plato and Aristotle. For many in the Renaissance, to compare Plato and Aristotle was to enter into, indeed, to settle the major issues of philosophy. From George Gemistus Pletho's *Treatise on the Differences between Plato and Aristotle* in 1439 to Jacopo Mazzoni's *Comparison of Plato and Aristotle* in 1597, Renaissance Europe produced a whole series of comparisons based on the assumption that Plato and Aristotle in some way encompassed the whole philosophical universe.²

One might be tempted to retort that it was not the Renaissance but Aristotle himself who began the Plato-Aristotle controversy. After all, in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle attacked Plato's theory of Forms, in the *Politics* he criticized Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, in *De anima* he refuted Plato's conception of the soul, in the *Physics* and *De caelo* he debunked Plato's notion of time and infinity, and in the *Prior Analytics* he had harsh things to say about Plato's theory of division. One can write a great deal about Aristotle's criticisms of Plato, and, in fact, modern scholars have.³ Nonetheless, Aristotle did not start the

¹ On the controversy in the Renaissance the best overview remains F. Purnell, Jr., 'Jacopo Mazzoni and his Comparison of Plato and Aristotle', PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1971; for the mid-fifteenth-century stage, see L. Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsmann*, 3 vols, Paderborn, 1923-42; repr. Aalen, 1967, I, pp. 346-98; P. O. Kristeller, 'Byzantine and Western Platonism in the Fifteenth Century', in idem, *Renaissance Concepts of Man and Other Essays*, New York, 1972, pp. 86-109; J. Monfasani, *George of Trebizond: A Biography and a Study of his Rhetoric and Logic*, Leiden, 1976, pp. 201-29; articles I, II, III, VII, X, and XIII in idem, *Byzantine Scholars in Renaissance Italy: Cardinal Bessarion and Other Emigrés*, Aldershot, 1995; and J. Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Leiden etc., 1990, pp. 165-263.

² The only sizeable survey is Purnell, 'Jacopo Mazzoni', pp. 64-92.

³ See H. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, Baltimore, 1944; repr. New York, 1962; G. S. Claghorn, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's 'Timaeus'*, The Hague, 1954; I. Düring, *Aristotle in the Ancient Biographical Tradition*, Göteborg, 1957,

Plato-Aristotle controversy. He criticized the Presocratics just as energetically as he criticized Plato;⁴ and though his largely lost opusculum *De ideis* seems to have been in the main a critique of Plato's theories,⁵ he wrote no major extant work the chief intent of which was to attack Plato or to compare himself with Plato.

Some Platonists in antiquity did not take kindly to Aristotle's criticisms of their master. So they served Aristotle some of his own medicine. In the mid-second century AD, Calvenus Taurus published a now lost critique of Aristotle's *Categories*.⁶ A generation later, another Platonist, Atticus, attacked Aristotle on a whole range of issues.⁷ The Church Father Eusebius of Caesarea preserved extensive fragments of Atticus's critique, which became well known in the later Renaissance.⁸ But in fact Taurus and Atticus were swimming against the tide. First of all, philosophical debate in antiquity was not bipolar.

pp. 318–32; G. R. Morrow, 'Aristotle's Comments on Plato's *Laws*', in *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century*, ed. by I. Düring and G. E. L. Owen, Göteborg, 1960, pp. 145–62; C. J. De Vogel, 'Aristotle's Attitude to Plato and the Theory of Ideas according to the *Topics*', in *Aristotle on Dialectic: Proceedings of the Third Symposium Aristotelicum*, ed. by G. E. L. Owen, Oxford, 1968, pp. 91–102; W. Weszl, *Il 'De ideis' di Aristotele e la teoria platonica delle idee*, with a critical edition of *De ideis* by D. Harlfinger, Florence, 1975; and G. E. L. Owen, 'The Platonism of Aristotle' and 'Dialectic and Eristic in the Treatment of Forms', in his *Logic, Science, and Dialectic*, ed. by M. Nussbaum, Ithaca, NY, 1986, pp. 200–20 and 221–38.

⁴ See H. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy*, Baltimore, 1935; repr. New York, 1964.

⁵ See G. Fine, *On Ideas: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms*, Oxford, 1993.

⁶ See K. Praechter, 'Taurus', in *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. by G. Wissowa et al., 34 vols, 15 suppl. vols, Stuttgart, Munich, 1894–1980, IV, pt A2 (1932), cols 1728–75; J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, Ithaca, NY, 1977, pp. 237–47; H. Dörrie, 'Kalbenos Tauros. Das Persönlichkeitsbild eines platonischen Philosophen um der Mitte des 2. Jahrh. n. Chr.', in his *Platonica Minora*, Munich, 1976, pp. 31–53.

⁷ See Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, pp. 247–58; P. Merlan, 'Greek Philosophy from Plato to Plotinus', in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by A. H. Armstrong, Cambridge, 1967, pp. 14–132, at pp. 73–77; P. Moraux, *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen von Andronikos bis Alexander von Aphrodisias*, 2 vols, Berlin, 1984, II, pp. 564–82; and C. Moreschini, 'Attico: una figura singolare del medioplatonismo', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. by W. Haase, Berlin and New York, II.36.1 (1988), pp. 477–91.

⁸ The excerpts are found in Eusebius of Caesarea, *De evangelica praeparatione*, XV.5–9. In his translation of 1448, George of Trebizond omitted Bk XV, and it was not until Robert Estienne's edition of the full Greek text in 1549 and his Latin translation of 1555 that it became easily available; see J. Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezuntiana: Texts, Documents, and Bibliographies of George of Trebizond*, Binghamton, NY, 1984, pp. 725–26. Atticus's fragments have been gathered by E. des Places, *Atticus. Fragments*, Paris, 1977.

The Sceptics captured the Platonic Academy when Arcesilaus took over the headship of the Academy in 270 BC. At the same time the Stoics and the Epicureans were fast becoming the two other leading philosophical schools of the day. For much of antiquity philosophical discourse was very much a debate between Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics.⁹ Platonists and Aristotelians had to answer the challenge of the new Hellenistic philosophies even more than they had to respond to each other. Second, Platonists were assimilating Aristotelian doctrines to Platonism. Already in the first century BC, Antiochus of Ascalon, the pivotal figure in Middle Platonism, had rejected the Scepticism of the New Academy and led the return to the dogmatic orthodoxy of the Old Academy of Plato. But for Antiochus that old-time Platonism unequivocally included Aristotle.¹⁰ The founder of Neoplatonism in the third century AD, Plotinus, criticized some Aristotelian doctrines, but he had clearly studied Aristotle and was significantly influenced by the Aristotelian commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias.¹¹ No less importantly, Plotinus's protégé Porphyry embraced Aristotle, writing an introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*, the famous *Isagoge*, and a commentary on the same.¹² Neoplatonism became the dominant philosophical school of late antiquity at the same time that Aristotle became an integral part of the Neoplatonic curriculum. Neoplatonists dominated the commentary tradition on Aristotle just as they dominated philosophy at the end of antiquity. Indeed, the last major late-antique Aristotelian commentator who was unquestionably

⁹ A handy introduction is P. O. Kristeller, *Greek Philosophers of the Hellenistic Age*, tr. by G. Woods, New York, 1993.

¹⁰ See G. Luck, *Der Akademiker Antiochos*, Berne, 1953; Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, pp. 52–106; Kristeller, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. 140–57.

¹¹ See R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, London, 1972, pp. 23–24, 28–29; R. W. Sharples, 'Alexander of Aphrodisias: Scholasticism and Innovation', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang*, II.36.2 (1987), pp. 1176–1243, at pp. 1220–23; S. K. Strange, 'Plotinus, Porphyry, and the Neoplatonic Interpretation of the *Categories*', *ibid.*, pp. 955–74; A. H. Armstrong, 'The Background of the Doctrine "That the Intelligibles are not Outside the Intellect"', in *Les Sources de Plotin*, Geneva, 1960, pp. 393–413; and P. Henry, 'Un comparaison chez Aristote, Alexandre et Plotin', *ibid.*, pp. 429–44. Also of interest is P. Hadot, 'The Harmony of Plotinus and Aristotle according to Porphyry', in *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and their Influence*, ed. by Richard Sorabji, Ithaca, NY, 1990, pp. 125–40.

¹² See the articles of Strange and Hadot cited in the previous note and A. Smith, 'Porphyrian Studies since 1913', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang*, II.36.2, pp. 717–73, at pp. 754–55; and S. Ebbesen, 'Porphyry's Legacy to Logic: A Reconstruction', in *Aristotle Transformed*, pp. 141–71.

not a Neoplatonist was Alexander of Aphrodisias in the early third century AD.¹³

The end of antiquity did not produce a bipolar philosophical world. Having appropriated Aristotle, the Neoplatonist harmonizers explained away his criticisms of Plato as differences of words, not substance, as misconceptions of Plato's doctrines, and as relevant only to the physical realm. Aristotle taught logic and physics. Plato reigned supreme as the master metaphysician and theologian.¹⁴

The Neoplatonic dominance carried over into the Middle Ages. In twelfth-century Byzantium Nicholas, the bishop of Methone, became so concerned by the popularity of the late antique pagan Neoplatonist Proclus that he published a detailed refutation of Proclus's *Elements of Theology*.¹⁵ We shall have more to say on Nicholas of Methone later, but for the moment what we need to point out is that in criticizing Proclus, Nicholas acted as a defender of Christian orthodoxy and not in any way as an Aristotelian. In the Latin West, the Neoplatonism of St Augustine and other late antique sources set the tone of philosophical discourse early on,¹⁶ but in the late twelfth century this Platonism started to give way to the overwhelming success

¹³ See the article of Sharples cited in n. 11 above. There is a debate between H. J. Blumenthal and E. P. Mahoney on whether Themistius (*fl.* 340s–385) was an Aristotelian or a Neoplatonist. Blumenthal says he was an Aristotelian; see his 'Themistius: The Last Peripatetic Commentator on Aristotle?', in *Aristotle Transformed*, pp. 113–24, and *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity: Interpretations of the 'De anima'*, Ithaca, NY, 1996, pp. 23–24. Mahoney argues for a Neoplatonic Themistius in 'Themistius and the Agent Intellect in James of Viterbo and Other Thirteenth-Century Philosophers', *Augustiniana*, 23 (1973), pp. 422–67, at pp. 428–31; and 'Neoplatonism, the Greek Commentators, and Renaissance Aristotelianism', in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. by D. J. O'Meara, Albany, NY, 1982, pp. 169–77, at n. 1 on pp. 264–66.

¹⁴ On the late antique commentators and the harmonization of Plato and Aristotle, see Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, pp. 24–25, and the various authors in *Aristotle Transformed*, pp. 3–6, 13, 145–46, 175, 181–83, 202, 216–17, 220, 229, 231, especially H. J. Blumenthal, 'Neoplatonic Elements in the *De anima* Commentaries', pp. 305–24; see also *idem*, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism*, esp. pp. 23–24, 26–27, 33, 36–37, 82–83, and F. Purnell, Jr., 'The Theme of Philosophic Concord and the Sources of Ficino's Platonism', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Studi e documenti*, ed. by G. C. Garfagnini, 2 vols, Florence, 1986, I, pp. 397–415.

¹⁵ Now available in a critical edition by A. D. Angelou: Nicholas of Methone, *Ἀνάπτυξις τῆς Θεολογικῆς Στοιχειώσεως Πρόκλου Πλατωνικοῦ φιλοσόφου. Refutation of Proclus' Elements of Theology*, Athens and Leiden, 1984. See also G. Podskalsky, 'Nikolaos von Methone und die Proklosrenaissance in Byzanz (11./12. Jh.)', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 42 (1976), pp. 509–23.

¹⁶ See E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, New York, 1955, pp. 113–50.

of the newly translated Aristotelian texts; and by the thirteenth century, Aristotelianism had found a rock-solid and permanent institutional base in the newly created universities. Platonism, or more precisely, Neoplatonism, continued to exercise a significant influence and some Latin intellectuals were overtly hostile to Aristotle,¹⁷ but overall Aristotelianism became as dominant in medieval Latin Europe as Neoplatonism had once been in late antiquity.

Consequently, the Renaissance's great interest in, and wholesale translation of, Plato's dialogues and various Neoplatonic texts, including Plotinus's *Enneads*,¹⁸ made possible what had never existed before, namely, a bipolar philosophical world. However, the fact that the Byzantine Platonist George Gemistus Pletho was the person who initiated the philosophical debate over the relative merits of Plato and Aristotle created difficulties for Christian Platonists. The problem was not so much that Pletho vigorously attacked Aristotle as that in the eyes of many contemporaries in the Greek East as well as in the Latin West he was a neopagan Platonist critic of Aristotle. I myself think that they were right.¹⁹ But the key question for us here is, what did Marsilio Ficino think?

¹⁷ See R. Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages*, rev. edn, Munich, 1981; P. O. Kristeller, 'Proclus as a Reader of Plato and Plotinus, and his Influence in the Middle Ages', in his *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, 4 vols, Rome, 1956-96, IV, pp. 115-37; J. Hankins, 'Plato in the Middle Ages', in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. by J. R. Strayer, 13 vols, New York, 1982-89, IX, cols 694-704; E. P. Mahoney, 'Aristotle as "The Worst Natural Philosopher" (*pessimus naturalis*) and "The Worst Metaphysician" (*pessimus metaphysicus*): His Reputation among some Franciscan Philosophers (Bonaventure, Francis of Meyronnes, Antonius Andreae, and Joannes Canonicus) and Later Reactions', in *Die Philosophie im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert. In Memoriam Konstanty Michalski (1879-1947)*, ed. by O. Pluta, Amsterdam, 1988, pp. 261-73.

¹⁸ In general see Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*; for Plotinus see D. J. O'Meara, 'Plotinus', in *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum. Mediaeval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries*, ed. by P. O. Kristeller et al., I-, Washington, DC, 1960-, VII (1992), pp. 55-73. Classic statements are P. O. Kristeller's essays, 'Renaissance Platonism', in his *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, ed. by M. Mooney, New York, 1979, pp. 50-65; and 'Renaissance Platonism', in his *Studies*, III, pp. 3-19.

¹⁹ See J. Monfasani, 'Platonic Paganism in the Fifteenth Century', in idem, *Byzantine Scholars in Renaissance Italy*, art. X (first published in *Reconsidering the Renaissance*, ed. by M. A. Di Cesare, Binghamton, NY, 1992, pp. 45-61), which collects the literature on this issue. Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, pp. 197-205, views Pletho as essentially an unconventional Christian, which is the position of P. O. Kristeller, but he brings no new evidence to bear and undercuts his own position by presupposing that Pletho saw Christianity as one manifestation of a better, more universal religion.

Pletho wrote his comparison, *De differentiis Platonis et Aristotelis*, in Greek in 1439 while a member of the Greek delegation to the Council of Florence.²⁰ Ficino was not even six years old at the time. But years later, once he had dedicated his life to Platonism and learned Greek, Ficino certainly did read Pletho. How could he not? Pletho was the leading Platonic authority of the first half of the fifteenth century. But what did Ficino read? And what did he take from that reading?

Ficino cited Pletho only five times in his published writings.²¹ The first time was in the *Platonic Theology* in a passage written at the earliest in the 1470s or at the latest in 1482. At the start of *De differentiis*, Pletho condemned Averroes for saying that Aristotle denied the immortality of the human soul when in fact the opposite was true. Since Ficino gave the *Platonic Theology* the subtitle *On the Immortality of the Soul*, this assertion of Pletho was a useful bit of ammunition in arguing that Aristotle agreed with Plato on the immortality of the soul. Ficino next cited Pletho three times in his commentary on Plotinus, written in the late 1480s, and most famously in the preface to Lorenzo the Magnificent where he recalled that Lorenzo's grandfather Cosimo de' Medici had been inspired to bring the Platonic Academy to Florence after listening frequently to Pletho disputing at the Council of Florence. Further on in the preface, in an obvious reference to the passage in Pletho's *De differentiis* already cited in the *Platonic Theology* ten years earlier, Ficino remarked that in contrast with modern Aristotelians the classical commentators and 'of late, Pletho' interpreted Aristotle more piously as believing in the immortality of the soul. Ficino cited Pletho two more times in the commentary on Plotinus, once in respect to the distinction between temporal and non-temporal causation and then again concerning the soul of the earth encompassing the human soul. The former reference might reflect passages in *De differentiis* and Pletho's *Reply* to George Scholarius,²² but the latter conforms to nothing we have from

²⁰ For the dating, see F. Masai, *Pléthon et le platonisme de Mistra*, Paris, 1956, p. 329, and B. Lagarde, 'Georges Gémiste Pléthon: "Contre les objections de Scholarios en faveur d'Aristote"', *Byzantion*, 59 (1989), pp. 354–507, at p. 438. For the text, see B. Lagarde, 'Le *De differentiis* de Pléthon d'après l'autographe de la Marcienne', *Byzantion*, 43 (1973), pp. 312–43. An English translation is available in C. M. Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes*, Oxford, 1986, pp. 191–214.

²¹ For what follows see Appendix 1 below.

²² Cf. Lagarde, 'Le *De differentiis*', p. 322.12–19 (Woodhouse, p. 193), and Lagarde, 'Georges Gémiste Pléthon', pp. 390–92.

Pletho. Ficino simply misremembered Pletho. His last reference to Pletho occurs in the commentary on ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite and amounts to nothing more than a citation of Pletho as a Neoplatonic metaphysician. In short, Ficino cited Pletho only late in his career, and then hardly at all and in a trivial way.

Worse, we know from Ficino's autograph marginal notes in MS Riccardianus 76,²³ which contains Pletho's *De differentiis*, Pletho's *Reply* to Scholarius defending *De differentiis*, and Pletho's *De fato*, that privately Ficino was harshly critical of Pletho. *De fato* lays out Pletho's doctrine of absolute, universal determinism and constitutes a chapter in Pletho's *Laws*,²⁴ which in turn was Pletho's blueprint for a revived paganism. Ficino wrote five comments in the margins of *De fato*, every one of which was strongly hostile to Pletho, differing only in degree of sarcasm and amount of contrary argument.²⁵

Whatever the truth of Ficino's story about Pletho inspiring Cosimo de' Medici, it tells us nothing about the intellectual debt Ficino owed Pletho. Indeed, the only aspect of Ficinian Platonism we can attribute to Pletho with confidence is the belief that Zoroaster was the first of the ancient theologians. We can make this attribution for two reasons: first, because early in his career Ficino viewed Hermes Trismegistus as the first of the ancient theologians and ignored Zoroaster;²⁶ and second, because Pletho was the only one who could have persuaded Ficino to displace Hermes with Zoroaster as the first of the

²³ For literature on and a description of this MS see *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Mostra di manoscritti, stampe e documenti, 17 maggio-16 giugno 1984*, ed. by S. Gentile, S. Niccoli and P. Viti, Florence, 1984, pp. 55-57, and tavv. XIIIa-b; and P. O. Kristeller, *Marsilio Ficino and his Work after Five Hundred Years*, Florence, 1987, p. 83.

²⁴ *De fato* is Book II, ch. 6 of the *Laws*; see Pletho, *Traité des Lois*, ed. by C. Alexandre and tr. by A. Pellissier, Paris, 1858; repr. Amsterdam, 1966, pp. 64-78.

²⁵ See Appendix 2 below. These marginal notes have been published by A. Keller, 'Two Byzantine Scholars and Their Reception in Italy. 1. Marsiglio Ficino and Gemistos Pletho on Fate and Free Will. 2. Demetrios Raoul Kavakes on the Nature of the Sun', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 20 (1957), pp. 363-70, at p. 365, but with so many mistakes that it is best to give a new transcription. Ficino also wrote occasional Greek and Latin comments in the margins of *De differentiis* and the *Reply* to Scholarius, but these were *notabilia*, paraphrases, or references to other sources.

²⁶ See P. O. Kristeller, *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino*, rev. edn, Florence, 1988, pp. 16-17; Marsilio Ficino, *Lettere*, ed. by S. Gentile, Florence, 1990, I, p. xxi; Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, pp. 460-64; and M. J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Florence, 1998, pp. 31-49.

ancient theologians. Pletho was the first person to treat Zoroaster as the fountainhead of the ancient theologians and he was the first to attribute to Zoroaster the so-called *Chaldean Oracles*, over which the Neoplatonists, starting with Porphyry, had made such a fuss.²⁷

Given Pletho's importance, Ficino was in something of a bind. On the one hand, he demonstrably mistrusted and even disliked Pletho; on the other, to attack and call into question the greatest Platonist of the previous generation would jeopardize his own brand of pious Platonism. Moreover, he owed an unacknowledged debt to Pletho for a key element in the doctrine of the *theologia prisca* that legitimized his claim for the piety of Platonism. Ficino's solution initially was to ignore Pletho, but eventually, when fear of Pletho's paganism waned, he cited Pletho briefly to serve his own purposes, be it to remind Lorenzo the Magnificent of his grandfather's commitment to supporting Platonic studies, or to quote Pletho in order to separate Aristotle from Averroes. What is certain is that Ficino steered clear of Pletho's anti-Aristotelianism. And not for lack of knowledge of the history of the controversy. For in addition to Pletho's *De differentiis* and *Reply* to Scholarius, MS Riccardianus 76 also contains Atticus's critique of Aristotle taken from Eusebius's *De evangelica praeparatione*. So Ficino had at his disposal the classical as well as the Renaissance Platonist counterattack against Aristotle.

Ficino even had access to Nicholas of Methone's twelfth-century *Refutation* of Proclus's *Elements of Theology*. Indeed, in his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, Ficino refers to the annotations he composed on Nicholas's *Refutation* and remarks that Nicholas shows how Platonic *rationes*, or arguments, do not threaten the Christian Trinity.²⁸ This

²⁷ J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés. Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspe d'après la tradition grecque*, 2 vols, Paris, 1938; repr. New York, 1975, I, pp. 158–63; II, pp. 251–62. Michael Allen suggests to me that since Ficino began the list of *theologi prisca* with Hermes Trismegistus in the 1463 preface to his translation of the *Pimander*, but with Zoroaster from 1469 onwards (see Allen, *Synoptic Art*, p. 31), we might date Ficino's first serious encounter with Pletho's writings to the mid- or late 1460s; see also Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, pp. 459–64.

²⁸ See Appendix 3 below. Ficino referred to Nicholas again a little further on in the commentary on *Parmenides*, in his *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basel, 1576; repr. Turin, 1959 etc., p. 1172: 'Ipsum igitur unum multitudinis omnis compositionisque et ordinis principium est et servatur et finis. Gregorius Nazianzenus Nicolausque theologi divinam trinitatem ab eiusmodi conditionibus exceptam volunt. Multitudinem enim illam esse participem unitatis et post unitatem, quae numerus quidam est, partium quarundam aliquid componentium.' Ficino also referred to

is an absurd statement because Nicholas wrote his *Refutation* precisely because he felt that the contemporary fad for Proclus and Proclus's Platonic *rationes* did threaten the Trinity.²⁹ We have Ficino's autograph annotations in MS grec 1256 of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. They are in fact brief and only cover the beginning of Nicholas's *Refutation*, stopping on fol. 5r.³⁰ Nicholas had nice things to say about Gregory Nazianzenus and Ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite, which Ficino notes; but Ficino could not but observe that Nicholas was at the same time quite critical of Proclus. If Ficino had continued his annotations, either he would have had to start refuting the good Byzantine bishop or he would have had to turn his back on his lifelong attempt to create a *pia philosophia* out of Platonism. He, of course, did neither. Instead, he avoided controversy by stopping the annotations. His premature remark in the *Parmenides* commentary remains as an unedited residue of his naïve attempt to enlist Nicholas of Methone in his enterprise to blend Platonism and Christianity.

But this does not mean that Ficino could avoid the Plato-Aristotle controversy altogether. The Greek émigré George of Trebizond had published in 1458 at Rome a violent attack on Plato and Pletho, the *Comparatio Aristotelis et Platonis*, the main thrust of which was to warn the Latin West of the pagan contagion contained in the Platonic tradition and embodied most recently in Pletho.³¹ When Pletho's student Cardinal Bessarion published a refutation of Trebizond, the *In calumniatorem Platonis*, in Rome in 1469, he distributed copies far and

Nicholas in his commentary on Plotinus; see *Opera omnia*, p. 1176 (on *Enneads*, V.3.12): 'qui dixerit absolute differre [*sc.* personas trinitatis Christianae], id definire verebitur mysterium; denique divinitati credendum, quod Nicolaus Graecus philosophus defendit strenue contra Proculum'. Christian Förstel has discovered that Ficino cited Nicholas of Methone yet again in his copy of Plotinus in Paris, BNF, MS gr. 1816, at V.3.12, with the marginal note, 'Lege Methodium contra Proculum.' See his article in the forthcoming proceedings of the conference *Marsilio Ficino. Fonti, testi, fortuna*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, Firenze, 1-3 ottobre 1999. See also M. J. B. Allen, 'Marsilio Ficino on Plato, the Neoplatonists, and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 37 (1984), pp. 555-84 (repr. in his *Plato's Third Eye: Studies in Marsilio Ficino's Metaphysics and its Sources*, Aldershot, 1995, art. IX), for a demonstration that Ficino was careful not to confuse Christian Trinitarianism and Neoplatonic doctrine.

²⁹ See Angelou's introduction to Nicholas of Methone, *Refutation*, ch. IV, pp. liii-lxiv.

³⁰ See Appendix 3 below.

³¹ See Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, pp. 156-70.

wide in what must have been one of the first, if not the first, propaganda campaigns to use the printing press.³² Bessarion sent a copy to the still relatively young and unknown Ficino preceded by a letter which referred to his earlier correspondence with Ficino.³³ Bessarion doubtless saw Ficino as a useful ally in Florence. Ficino, for his part, seems to have been quite deliberately cultivating the Greek cardinal and other Roman dignitaries as insurance in the event that Medici patronage dried up and he had to find support elsewhere.³⁴ However, in his response, despite his desire to please and their common devotion to Plato, while Ficino praised Bessarion and complained of those who had contempt for the secret treasures of Plato, he studiously avoided attacking Trebizond or any other Aristotelian.³⁵ He was just not going to be dragged into the Plato-Aristotle controversy started by the Greeks.

Nonetheless, Ficino did catch a glancing blow in the controversy, not, however, from George of Trebizond, but from George's son Andreas, and not concerning Plato and Aristotle, but concerning astrology and astronomy. Andreas had become one of Pope Sixtus IV's two private secretaries.³⁶ In the spring of 1482 he dedicated to Sixtus his father's commentary on Ptolemy's *Almagest*. Part way through the preface he suddenly launched into an attack upon some unnamed ignoramus (*sciolus*) who had dedicated his life to Plato and who, Andreas heard, was deprecating what Andreas called 'the wondrous order and incredible regularity of the stars'.³⁷ This Platonist could only have been Ficino. Andreas must have gotten wind of Ficino's *Disputation against the Judgment of Astrologers*, written but not published five years earlier. Perhaps Andreas thought its publication was imminent, although in fact the text Ficino was preparing to publish that

³² Ibid., pp. 219–21; Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, I, pp. 364–83.

³³ Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III, pp. 543–44; Ficino, *Lettere*, ed. Gentile, I, p. 34.

³⁴ See P. O. Kristeller, 'Marsilio Ficino and the Roman Curia', in his *Studies*, IV, pp. 265–80. Ficino even paid a visit to Rome in this period.

³⁵ See Ficino, *Lettere*, ed. Gentile, I, pp. 35–36 and 246–47 (an earlier draft). Ficino's letter is also edited in Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, III, pp. 544–45.

³⁶ See W. von Hofmann, *Forschungen zur Geschichte der kurialen Behörden vom Schisma bis zur Reformation*, 2 vols, Rome, 1914, II, p. 123; and Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, p. 237.

³⁷ For Andreas's preface see Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, p. 233, idem, *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, pp. 787–88, and idem, 'A Description of the Sistine Chapel under Pope Sixtus IV', *Artibus et Historiae*, 7 (1983), pp. 9–18 (reprinted as Art. VIII in my *Language and Learning in Renaissance Italy*, Aldershot, 1994). For the relevant portion of the preface, see *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, p. 798, §§ 10–12.

year was not the *Disputation* against the astrologers but the *Platonic Theology*, which came off the press at the end of 1482.³⁸ In a way, Andreas was off target since, as *De vita* shows, Ficino later repented of his anti-astrological views and very much believed in celestial influences.³⁹ *De vita* also shows that Ficino embraced white magic as well.⁴⁰ This is especially interesting since at the end of his screed in the preface to the *Almagest*, Andreas mocked the unnamed Platonist for his pretensions of being a *magus* and for the magical incantations directed toward the heavens that the *impurissima familia* of Plato practiced.⁴¹ Although he did not quite get the particulars right, Andreas understood that the Florentine Platonism he was attacking was different from the quite unmagical Platonism of Gemistus Pletho which his father George had opposed.

This leaves us with one last question, but it is the most important one. What was Ficino's attitude toward Aristotle? The answer depends on what period of Ficino's life we are talking about. In his student days, Ficino trained in Aristotelianism; and as a young intellectual he taught Aristotelian philosophy at the university of Florence and gave private lessons on Aristotelian logic.⁴² In this early period and even for a while after 1456, when he started to learn Greek and dedicated his life to Platonism, he assumed concordance between Plato and Aristotle. In his youthful *Tractatus de anima*, he had Plato

³⁸ M. Fuiano, 'Astrologia ed umanesimo in due prefazioni di Andrea di Trebisonda', *Atti dell'Accademia Pontaniana*, n.s., 17 (1967-68), pp. 385-405, mistakenly thought Andreas was attacking Giovanni Pico della Mirandola; E. Garin, 'Il platonismo come ideologia della sovversione europea: La polemica antiplatonica di Giorgio Trapezunzio', in *Studia humanitatis: Ernesto Grassi zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by E. Hora and E. Kessler, Munich, 1973, pp. 113-20, at p. 120, and P. Zambelli, 'Platone, Ficino e la magia', *ibid.*, pp. 121-42, at pp. 133-34, correct the error.

³⁹ See M. Ficino, *Three Books on Life. A Critical Edition and Translation*, ed. and tr. by C. V. Kaske and J. R. Clark, Binghamton, NY, 1989, Introduction, pp. 18-22, 32-38, and Bks II and III *passim* of *De vita*; see also D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, London, 1958; repr. Notre Dame, Ind., 1975, Stroud, Glos., 2000, pp. 3-24.

⁴⁰ Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed. Kaske and Clark, pp. 45-55, and Bk III of *De vita*, *passim*; Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, pp. 30-53.

⁴¹ Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, p. 798, §12: 'Quis enim ignorat impurissimam sui Platonis familiam profiteri magica incantamina celo pendere et ex astris initia ducere? An fortasse, ut magum se neget, magie principia negat? Sed ait an negat, non curo.'

⁴² See P. O. Kristeller, 'The Scholastic Background of Marsilio Ficino', in his *Studies*, I, pp. 35-97, S. J. Hough, 'An Early Record of Marsilio Ficino', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 30 (1977), pp. 301-04, and J. Davies, 'Marsilio Ficino: Lecturer at the Studio fiorentino', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 45 (1992), pp. 785-90.

and Aristotle agreeing on definition although one proceeded by division and the other by composition;⁴³ and in *De virtutibus moralibus* of 1457 he asserts a communality of origin from Socrates between Platonists, Aristotelians, and Stoics.⁴⁴ No one knows exactly when Ficino decided that Hermes Trismegistus was the first of the ancient theologians leading to Plato, but a doxographical list he wrote in this period is significant here. In the margin of his copy of Chalcidius's commentary on the *Timaeus*, Ficino wrote: 'Trismegistus, Pythagoras, Philolaus, Numenius, Plato and Aristotle, the Stoics held the same opinion concerning matter.'⁴⁵ Not only did Ficino include Aristotle and the Stoics in the sequence, but he also paired Aristotle with Plato before the Stoics. All the names in the chronological list are written in sequence on separate lines save for the names of Plato and Aristotle, which are written on the same line and joined together with an 'et'.⁴⁶ In the opuscle *On the Four Sects of Philosophers* of 1457, Ficino noted that Aristotle was unclear about the immortality of the soul and that he had denied against Plato that the world had a beginning. Yet, Ficino immediately went out of his way to show that in ethics Aristotle and Plato agreed.⁴⁷ Similarly, in the treatise *De voluptate* of 1458, after having initially suggested that Aristotelians disagree with Plato, Ficino concluded that Aristotle in fact really agreed with Plato.⁴⁸

But once we leave this early period, it is easy to find instances where Ficino either notes differences between Plato and Aristotle or even chides Aristotle for turning on his teacher. In 1476, Ficino asserted the superiority of Plato's ethics over Aristotle's,⁴⁹ in 1477,

⁴³ Kristeller, 'Scholastic Background', p. 67.

⁴⁴ P. O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2 vols, Florence, 1937; repr. Florence, 1973, II, pp. 1-3.

⁴⁵ See Appendix 4 below.

⁴⁶ See also Marsilio Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne de l'immortalité des âmes*, ed. and tr. by R. Marcel, 3 vols, Paris, 1964-70, I, p. 224: 'Zoroaster, Mercurius, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras, Plato, quorum vestigia sequitur plurimum physicus Aristoteles.'

⁴⁷ Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, II, pp. 8-9; for the date see *ibid.*, I, p. cxxxix.

⁴⁸ Ficino, *Opera omnia*, pp. 991-92, 997-98. The work has a colophon dating it 1457 in Florentine style.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 735: 'Aut si forte ocuis succurrere res urgebat, saltem Aristotelis more non huic homini dare, sed homini, imo Platonis more non huic homini dare, sed Deo.' The letter is dated 2 December 1476, amended to 10 December 1476 in *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, 6 vols to date, London, 1975-, II, p. 41.

he accused Aristotle of kicking his teacher Plato,⁵⁰ and in another letter that same year, he remarked that even Aristotle could not tolerate the false calumnies uttered against Plato, a comment that only made sense if one presumed that Aristotle was normally critical of Plato.⁵¹ Even earlier, in his commentary on the *Philebus* of 1469, Ficino bragged of destroying the pettifogging criticisms of the Aristotelians against Plato concerning the highest good⁵² and accused Aristotle of slandering Plato.⁵³ About the same time, in his commentary on the *Symposium*, he also made sure to correct deceptive Aristotelian interpretations of Plato concerning the soul.⁵⁴

But how does this evidence of hostility toward Aristotle square with the numerous times Ficino cited or spoke well of Aristotle, especially in the *Platonic Theology*?⁵⁵ Indeed, how could this hostility coexist with Ficino's numerous and emphatic assertions of concord between Plato and Aristotle?⁵⁶ The answer, I believe, can be found in the famous preface to his translation of Plotinus where Ficino condemns contemporary Aristotelians, misled by Averroes and Alexander of Aphrodisias, for diverging from the Aristotle whom classical as well as modern commentators such as Giovanni Pico and George Gemistus

⁵⁰ *Opera omnia*, p. 744: 'Cupio, si liceret, monere magistros ne obliviscantur, Aristotelem in divinum Platonem recalcitrasse.' (*Letters*, II, p. 66).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 770: 'Verum Aristoteles, cui veritas magis quam Plato fuit amica, tam falsas in virum sanctum calumnias sustinere non potuit.' (*Letters*, III, p. 47).

⁵² Marsilio Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. and tr. by M. J. B. Allen, Berkeley etc., 1975, p. 113: 'Ex quo Peripateticorum contra divum Platonem cavillationes explosae iam sunt.'

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 177: 'In quo et Aristoteles haud veritus est divum Platonem calumniari.'

⁵⁴ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, ed. and tr. by R. Marcel, Paris, 1956, p. 231; Ficino's volgare version of this passage gives a better sense of his annoyance with Aristotle (*ibid.*, n. 1): 'non l'intendiamo in quel modo corporale, il quale Aristotile, cavillando, appose al gran Platone . . .'

⁵⁵ See *Theologia Platonica*, ed. Marcel, I, pp. 53, 64, 102, 120, 122, 163, 224, 270, 282, 318; II, pp. 11, 38, 59, 65, 68, 81, 94, 107, 141, 202, 227, 252, 279, 286; III, 9, 17, 40, 45-47, 64-66, 77, 87, 97-101, 104, 170, 192-93, 267-68, 282 (*Tres contemplationes Platonicae gradus*), and 333 (*Quinque Platonicae sapientiae claves*); see also Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, II, pp. 4, 8, 32, 61, 63, 67, 74, 132; Ficino, *Lettere*, ed. Gentile, I, p. 203 (*Letters*, I, p. 173); Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet*, ed. Marcel, pp. 215 and 247; M. J. B. Allen, *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer*, Berkeley etc., 1981, p. 113 (= *In Phaedrum*); and *Opera omnia*, pp. 1395, 1488, 1537, 1544, 1553, 1570, 1596, 1602, 1654, 1770, 1786, 1920.

⁵⁶ In general see Purnell, 'The Theme of Philosophic Concord'. For passages based on Themistius see n. 63 below; see also *Opera omnia*, pp. 869-70 (letter of 1485 to Ermolao Barbaro, in the forthcoming vol. VII of *Letters*), pp. 952-53 (letter of 1493 to Francesco da Diacceto); p. 1438 (*In Timaeum*). See also R. Marcel, *Marsile Ficin (1433-1499)*, Paris, 1958, pp. 639-40.

Pletho have piously interpreted as agreeing with Plato on the immortality of the soul.⁵⁷ From the 1460s on, Ficino practiced not a philosophical but a rhetorical strategy in respect to Aristotle. Well aware of the differences between Plato and Aristotle, Ficino chose to ignore them in order to win the contemporary philosophical world over to Plato. Perforce, Averroes, not Aristotle, became Ficino's *bête noire*.⁵⁸

To demonstrate the concordance between Plato and Aristotle, Ficino never wrote a commentary on Aristotle or a comparison of the two philosophers. Instead, he cited Aristotle wherever it was convenient to do so as he commented on Plato or argued what he conceived to be Platonic philosophy.

How artificial this exercise was can be seen from Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*. For the Neoplatonists the *Parmenides* was the metaphysical dialogue *par excellence*, providing the authoritative text for their doctrine of the three divine hypostases, i.e., the first hypostasis, the One, which transcends being, the second hypostasis, the Intellect, where being begins and the Ideas reside, and the third hypostasis, the World Soul. This metaphysical structure, of course, runs completely contrary to Aristotle's conception of Being as the highest principle of reality and his belief that Being and the One are coterminous. The brilliant young Giovanni Pico della Mirandola had faced this contradiction in his treatise *On Being and the One* and had resolved it by separating Plato from the Neoplatonists and making him an Aristotelian on the issue of the One.⁵⁹ In his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, Ficino chided Pico for harmonizing Plato and Aristotle in this fashion.⁶⁰ Yet Ficino never criticized Aristotle in the commentary. He did acknowledge in passing that Platonists (we would say Neoplatonists) reject the Aristotelian position that unity

⁵⁷ The preface can now be read in O'Meara, 'Plotinus', pp. 69–70.

⁵⁸ Cf. J. Hankins, 'Marsilio Ficino as a Critic of Scholasticism', *Vivens Homo*, 5 (1994), pp. 325–34.

⁵⁹ See M. J. B. Allen, 'The Second Ficino-Pico Controversy: Parmenidean Poetry, Eristic and the One', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, ed. Garfagnini, pp. 417–55 (repr. in *Plato's Third Eye*, art. X), esp. pp. 429–31; and S. Toussaint, *L'Esprit du Quattrocento: Le 'De Ente et Uno' de Pic de la Mirandole*, Paris, 1995.

⁶⁰ See Allen, 'Second Ficino-Pico Controversy', pp. 430–31, who quotes from the *editio princeps*, the *Commentaria in Platonem*, Florence, 1496, fol. 20v, and the 1576 *Opera omnia*, p. 1164: 'Utinam mirandus ille iuvenis disputationes discussionesque superiores diligenter consideravisset antequam tam confidenter tangeret praeceptorem ac tam secure contra Platoniorum omnium sententiam divulgaret et divinum Parmenidem simpliciter esse logicum et Platonem una cum Aristotele ipsum cum ente unum et bonum adaequavisse.'

and multitude are conditions of being.⁶¹ But a few pages further on in the commentary, Ficino himself made a stab at harmonizing Aristotle with Plato. He argued that Aristotle preferred to call the First a *final* cause in order to avoid any division or motion in the First. By this argument Ficino had neatly explained away Aristotle's rejection of Plato's Demiurge as the *efficient* cause of the world. At the same time, he had insinuated rather than asserted against Pico that the Neoplatonic notion of the One could be reconciled with Aristotle.⁶²

No less strange was Ficino's proof text for the harmony of Plato and Aristotle. It is a passage in Themistius's commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*. Themistius says that from the material that he, Themistius, has provided one has the resources to understand the thought of Aristotle, Theophrastus, and Plato.⁶³ Ficino read this passage as an assertion that the three philosophers agreed about the soul. Ficino cited it three times: first, in the *Platonic Theology* of the 1470s⁶⁴ and then in the prefaces he wrote to King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary⁶⁵ and to Filippo Valori in 1490⁶⁶ of his translation of Priscian the Lydian's *Paraphrase* of Theophrastus's psychology. What is odd about this proof text is its isolation in Ficino. Of the extant late antique commentators on Aristotle, the great harmonizer was Simplicius, not Themistius. One finds assertions and explications of the harmony between Plato and Aristotle in Simplicius's commentaries on the

⁶¹ *Opera omnia*, p. 1172: 'Non recipient ergo Platonici Peripateticum illud, unitatem multitudinemve ad ens ipsum quasi conditiones quasdam eius quodammodo sequi . . .'

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 1178: 'Forsan vero et Aristoteles, ut divisionem atque motum evitaret in primo, causam finalem manifestius quam efficientem censuit nominandam.'

⁶³ Themistius, *In libros Aristotelis De anima paraphrasis*, ed. by R. Heinze, in *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, V.3, Berlin, 1899, pp. 108.35–109.3. This is how R. B. Todd translates the passage in Themistius, *On Aristotle on the Soul*, Ithaca, NY, 1996, p. 134: 'But, as I have said, making claims about what philosophers believe involves special study (σχολή) and reflection. Still, it does seem perhaps relevant to insist that someone could best understand the insight of Aristotle and Theophrastus on these [matters], indeed perhaps also that of Plato himself, from the passages that we have gathered.' Todd notes that σχολή might also mean 'lecture'.

⁶⁴ *Theologia Platonica*, ed. Marcel, III, p. 104; see also III, p. 17.

⁶⁵ *Opera omnia*, p. 896.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 896–97, and p. 1801; he hailed here Pico's project of demonstrating the concord of the philosophers, playing on the same pun (*vir mirandus*) that he used in referring to Pico in the commentary on the *Parmenides* (see n. 60 above). Cf. Ficino's letter of 1488 (*Opera omnia*, p. 890; in *Letters*, VII, forthcoming) praising Pico as the literal and figurative prince of Concordia.

Categories, on the *Physics*, on *De anima* and *De caelo*.⁶⁷ Yet Ficino never cites them. The reason, I believe, is simple. Ficino never read Themistius's relatively short commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*, let alone Simplicius's many times larger commentary on the same.⁶⁸ Ficino could, of course, read Themistius in the Greek. However, in the thirteenth century William of Moerbeke made a Latin translation.⁶⁹ There are only eight manuscripts of this translation extant, and none of them, as far as I can tell, would have been available to Ficino.⁷⁰ Rather, I would contend, he lifted this Themistian passage straight out of one of his favorite sources, Thomas Aquinas, who quotes it in his treatise *De unitate intellectus*.⁷¹ Ficino read neither Themistius nor Simplicius because he had no real interest in establishing philosophically the concord between Plato and Aristotle. The

⁶⁷ Cf. for example his prescription in the *Categories* commentary on how an Aristotelian exegete should approach the text (Simplicius, *Commentaire sur les Catégories*, tr. and comm. by Ilsetraut Hadot, fasc. 1, Leiden, 1990, p. 9.28–32): 'Il faut aussi, à mon avis, qu'il ne regarde pas seulement la lettre de ce qu'Aristote dit contre Platon, pour condamner le désaccord de ces philosophes, mais qu'il considère le sens et suive à la trace l'accord qui, sur la plupart des points, existe entre eux.' For the commentary on *De anima* (viewed by some scholars since 1972 as the work of Ps.-Simplicius), see Blumenthal, 'Neoplatonic Elements', pp. 307–09, 316–18, 321, 322, and idem, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism*, pp. 83–84, 88–89, 142; for the commentaries on the *Physics* and *De caelo*, see his 'Neoplatonic Elements', p. 306, and *Aristotle and Neoplatonism*, pp. 26–27.

⁶⁸ As Michael Allen has pointed out to me, Ficino did mention the commentators Simplicius, Themistius, and Eustratius in the same passage in his commentary on the *Philebus* (ed. Allen, p. 183); but as Allen also notes, p. 542, n. 92, the 'passage in question is [Aristotle] *Metaphysics* XII, 1072b–1074a'. No commentary on the *Metaphysics*, however, by Simplicius or Eustratius is extant. We have Themistius's paraphrase of the *Metaphysics*, but it first became available in 1558 in a translation from the Hebrew by Moses Finzius (Venice: Hieronymus Scotus; see Themistius, *In Aristotelis Metaphysicorum librum A paraphrasis*, ed. by S. Landauer, *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, Berlin, 1902, p. vii). Ficino must have had these references second-hand, though I have not been able to identify the source.

⁶⁹ See M. Grabmann, *Guglielmo di Moerbeke O.P., il traduttore delle opere di Aristotele*, Rome, 1946; repr. Rome, 1970, pp. 135–40, and the edition by G. Verbeke, Themistius, *Commentaire sur le traité de l'âme d'Aristote. Traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke. Édition critique et étude sur l'utilisation du commentaire dans l'œuvre de Saint Thomas*, Leiden, 1973.

⁷⁰ See Themistius, *Commentaire sur le traité de l'âme*, ed. Verbeke, pp. lxxii–xcvii. The eight manuscripts are Erfurt, Amplon., Fol. 40 and Fol. 363, Munich, BSB, clm 317, Oxford, Balliol 105, Paris, BNF, lat. 14698 and 16133, Toledo, Bibl. Capit. 47–12 and Venice, Bibl. Marc., lat. VI.21.

⁷¹ Themistius, *Commentaire sur le traité de l'âme*, ed. Verbeke, p. 244.3–6 = Thomas Aquinas, *De unitate intellectus*, V.121. Cf. Verbeke, p. xl. Moerbeke's translation runs: 'Quod autem maxime aliquis utique ex verbis quae collegimus accipiat de his sententiam Aristotelis et Theophrasti, magis autem forte et ipsius Platonis; hoc enim promptum forte proplare.'

isolated quotation from Themistius came to him on the cheap and was adequate for his purposes—even if he had to read into it more than it actually said. Late in life, as a gesture toward providing evidence for his thesis of concord, Ficino translated and commented on Priscian the Lydian's relatively short *Paraphrase* of Theophrastus (*Metaphrasis in Theophrastum*),⁷² which, incidentally, does *not* clearly assert concord between Plato and Aristotle.

In sum, Ficino did enter into the Plato-Aristotle controversy, but on his own terms and with a minimum of effort. Irenic by temperament and appreciative of Aristotle because of his early philosophical education, he wanted no part of the debate started by Pletho and continued by the Greeks in Renaissance Italy. Nor was he willing to spend any serious amount of time or labor demonstrating Aristotle's harmony with Plato. I suspect that in his heart of hearts he doubted that such an enterprise could have succeeded. Instead, to win the goodwill of contemporary Aristotelians, he decided on essentially a rhetorical policy. He insinuated and on occasion baldly asserted harmony between Plato and Aristotle. He called on contemporary Aristotelians to follow the old Aristotelians. By 'old Aristotelians' he meant specifically, the ancient *Neoplatonist* commentators on Aristotle and on Theophrastus, Aristotle's successor in the Lyceum. On the basis of his forced interpretation of the Themistian quotation lifted from St Thomas, Ficino believed that Theophrastus, and therefore Aristotle, could be shown to have agreed with Plato.⁷³

Concomitantly, Ficino refuted in detail Aristotle's medieval Arab interpreter Averroes for impiously denying the immortality of the human soul.⁷⁴ But apart from the issue of the immortality of the soul, Ficino spoke well of or cited favorably Averroes several times even in the *Platonic Theology* and the commentary on Plotinus.⁷⁵ Ficino

⁷² *Opera omnia*, pp. 1801–35; see M. J. B. Allen, *Icastes: Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's 'Sophist'*, Berkeley etc., 1989, p. 187.

⁷³ In addition to the preface to the commentary on Plotinus, see also *Theologia Platonica*, ed. Marcel, III, p. 104.

⁷⁴ For Ficino labelling Latin Averroists 'sophists', see Allen, *Icastes*, pp. 22–23, n. 22; for his viewing them (and the adherents of Alexander of Aphrodisias) as threats to religion because of their denial of providence, see Allen, *Synoptic Art*, pp. 14–15.

⁷⁵ *Theologia Platonica*, ed. Marcel, I, p. 53; II, pp. 257, 286; III, pp. 267–68 (*Tres contemplationis Platonicae gradus*); *Opera omnia*, pp. 1553, 1570, 1593 (*In Plotinum*); *In Philebum*, ed. Allen, p. 183. As Gentile, *Lettere*, I, p. xxxi, n. 48, points out, in his youthful *De voluptate* of 1458, Ficino called Averroes 'Peripateticorum interpretum acutissimus' (*Opera omnia*, p. 998).

wished to incorporate as much as he could even of the medieval Aristotle into his harmony of Plato and Aristotle. In other words, Ficino shared Pico's desire for a *concordia philosophica*.⁷⁶ The difference was that Ficino saw concord as a rhetorical strategy to convince the world of his Neoplatonic Plato by glossing over as much as possible real differences between Plato and Aristotle and by calling upon a Neoplatonic Aristotle whenever possible and even on occasion upon Averroes. Giovanni Pico, on the other hand, proposed a principled and methodical synthesis which would have transcended Plato, Aristotle, and all other philosophers. Furthermore, Ficino absolutely had to reject Pico's concord when, as was the case in Pico's *On Being and the One*, it resulted in the subordination of Plato to Aristotle. For Ficino, *concordia philosophica* was never a goal in itself; it was only an instrument in achieving his real goal, which was the victory of the one true and pious philosophy, the *Theologia Platonica*.

APPENDIX 1: MARSILIO FICINO'S CITATIONS OF GEORGE GEMISTUS PLETHO

As Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, II, p. 361, and Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, p. 610, n. 2, record, Ficino cited Pletho on only five occasions in his published works.

1.

The first time was in *Theologia Platonica*, XV.1 (ed. Marcel, III, pp. 8–9). We have no way of dating exactly when Ficino wrote this passage. The *Theologia Platonica* itself was composed in 1469–74 and demonstrably revised to some extent from that time up to its printing in late 1482 (the printer's colophon is dated 7 November 1482; Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, I, pp. lxxix–lxxxiii; Marcel, 'Introduction' to his edition, I, p. 19). So the passage could be as late as 1482 and, given its location (the *Theologia Platonica* has only 18 books), certainly no earlier than the early 1470s.

Ficino says that Averroes, working from wretched Arabic translations ('Aristotelicos libros in linguam barbaram e Graeca perversos potiusquam conversos legisse traditur'), in some obscure matters failed to grasp the meaning of Aristotle's hyper-condensed prose ('in quibusdam rebus reconditis brevissimi scriptoris mens eum latuerit.'). Then Ficino continues (I have slightly altered Marcel's text): 'Quod illi contigisse Platonius Pletho tes-

⁷⁶ Cf. in this regard Ficino's letter to Ermolao Barbaro encouraging his work on Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, p. 869 (in *Letters*, VII, forthcoming).

tatur ac peritissimi quique Graecorum. Et quod maximum est, adversus Averroem Graeca Aristotelis verba reclamant. Ait ipse Pletho Aristotelem sine controversia censuisse hominum animos esse multos et sempiternos. Subiungit nolle se Aristotelis verba pervertere, etsi Aristoteles Platonis ceterorumque philosophorum verba pervertit. Haec ille.'

Pletho referred to Averroes in his reply to Scholarius (ed. Lagarde, p. 374.15–24), but to compliment his subtlety as opposed to Scholarius's obtuseness and to say he wished to save the Latins from being fooled by Averroes into thinking Aristotle perfect (ed. Lagarde, p. 489.26–31). Ficino is clearly citing the beginning of Pletho's *De differentiis*, where Pletho blames Averroes for upholding the abhorrent view that the soul is mortal although Aristotle himself does not *seem* to make this ignorant mistake ('οὐδ' Ἀριστοτέλους ταύτην δοκοῦντος τὴν ἀμαθίαν ἀμαθαίνειν'; ed. Lagarde, p. 321.7–14; tr. Woodhouse, p. 192, § 1). Pletho goes on immediately to say that one must be honest and not slander Aristotle though Aristotle himself slandered most of his predecessors. Ficino may also be thinking of the end of *De differentiis*, where Pletho criticizes Aristotle for attacking all his predecessors (ed. Lagarde, pp. 342.26 and 36–37; tr. Woodhouse, p. 213, § 55). The element not found in Pletho is the gloss added by Ficino that Averroes relied on faulty translations.

2.

The next three citations are to be found in Ficino's commentary on Plotinus's *Enneads*. Ficino began the commentary in 1486 and continued to work on it at least until 1490. The first printed edition is dated 5 November 1492 (Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, I, pp. lxxvi, cxxvi–cxxviii). In the preface to Lorenzo de' Medici, Ficino describes how Lorenzo's grandfather Cosimo was inspired to bring the Platonic Academy to Florence after listening frequently to Pletho disputing at the Council of Florence: 'philosophum Graecum nomine Gemistum, cognomine Plethonem, quasi Platonem alterum de mysteriis Platonicis disputantem frequenter audivit'. Further on in the preface, he lamented the fact that modern Aristotelians, one party following Averroes and another Alexander of Aphrodisias, believe the human soul to be mortal. Both groups have deserted Aristotle, whose mind few today except Ficino's co-Platonist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola interpret 'with the same faithful piety as did once Theophrastus, Themistius, Porphyry, Simplicius, Avicenna, and, of late, Pletho.' ('a suo etiam Aristotele defecisse. Cuius mentem hodie pauci praeter sublimem Picum complatonicum nostrum ea pietate qua Theophrastus olim et Themistius, Porphyrius, Simplicius, Avicenna, et nuper Plethon interpretantur'; see *Opera omnia*, p. 1537; O'Meara, 'Plotinus', pp. 69–70).

3.

On *Enneads*, II.1.1 Ficino asserts that in *Timaeus*, 30–31 Plato posited the world soul as created prior to its body both in its power and in its coming-to-be

(*corpore suo priorem tum virtute tum generatione creatam*). Plotinus, Porphyry and Proclus explain that priority here does not mean an actual interval of time but the precedence assumed by the soul because the succession within the soul of the 'scattering of forms' (*in ipsa formarum discursione*) precedes in origin the motion of the world. Then he remarks that Heraclitus's notion of an eternal flux is not inconsistent with this doctrine and cites, among other authorities, Pletho as 'not denying that it is probable': 'Mitto nunc opinionem Heracliti quodlibet mundi corpus etiam sphaerarum stellarumque effluere semper atque refluere ideoque vel desinere vel perpetuo renovari, quod et Plato tetigit, ubi mundum ait fieri quidem semper, esse nunquam [*Theaetetus*, 152E1], et Plotinus hic et Proculus in Timaeo, quod et Pletho non negat esse probabile, nosque idem in Theologia fieri posse probamus [XI.6; ed. Marcel, II, p. 136].' (*Opera omnia*, II, p. 1594). I could not track down a passage that corresponds exactly to Ficino's reference, but on the distinction between temporal and non-temporal causation, see *De differentiis*, ed. Lagarde, p. 322.12–20 (tr. Woodhouse, p. 193, § 4) and the *Reply* to Scholarius, ed. Lagarde, pp. 388.18–390.2, 394.26–398.15, and 426.29–430.1). Cf. Woodhouse, p. 374, who also cites this passage but gives no reference to any writing of Pletho's.

4.

A little further along in the commentary, concerning *Enneads*, II.1.3, Ficino cites Pletho as one of the witnesses to the fact that Aristotle thought our human souls are encompassed by or enclosed in the soul of the earth (*Opera omnia*, p. 1596): 'Sed animae particulares spiritum hunc, qui vapor sanguinis est, quo regunt corpus, ex sanguine calefacto producant, spiritum vero coelestem rationalis animae, quo quasi proxime se involvunt, ab ipsa coeli substantia ubique praesente suscipiunt, quem Plotinus alibi confitetur accipi, etiam ab anima terrae, quo et hic nostras involvi Aristotelem etiam putasse testis est Plutarchus, Ioannes Grammaticus et Proclus atque Pletho.' Pletho speaks substantively about the soul in two places, *De differentiis*, ed. Lagarde, pp. 326.30–328.4 (tr. Woodhouse, pp. 197–99, §§ 17–20) and his *Reply* to Scholarius, ed. Lagarde, pp. 438.20–444.27 and 448.4–452.5; and nowhere in these pages does he remotely suggest the opinion that Ficino says he attributed to Aristotle.

5.

Ficino cited Pletho for the last time in his commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's *De divinis nominibus*, which he began to work on in 1491 after finishing Pseudo-Dionysius's *De mystica theologia* (Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, I, p. cxv). The first edition is to be dated either 1496 or 1497 (*ibid.*, I, pp. lxxviii and cxvi). Commenting on the supereminence of the supersensual God in the order of being in *De divinis nominibus*, II.10, Ficino calls Pletho as a witness in the company of distinguished metaphysicians: *Opera omnia*, p. 1047: 'Dicitur autem Deus ens, ut ita dixerim, superenter,

quod videlicet entia procreat. Dicitur et entia superenter excedere, quoniam natura in summo grado entium collocatur, reliqua in secundo vel tertio. Alioquin partim cum ceteris conveniret quidem, partim vero differret, foretque ita compositus. Praesertim sic una sit entis ipsius univoca ratio entibus quibuscunque communis. Quod illustres metaphysici nonnulli una cum Platonico Plethone senserunt. Deus itaque et extra et supra totam entium latitudinem excellenter existit.' Pletho calls God superessential and describes how He transcends all multiplicity in *De differentiis*, ed. Lagarde, p. 337.7–28 (tr. Woodhouse, pp. 207–08, § 43). But the place where Pletho talks about a second and third order of being after the One is in the *Laws*, ed. Alexandre, pp. 44–46 and 94–118, where he explains the generation of the gods below Jupiter.

APPENDIX 2: MARSILIO FICINO'S AUTOGRAPH MARGINALIA IN
FLORENCE, BIBLIOTECA RICCARDIANA, MS 76

Fols 96r–98v, Pletho, *De fato*

[1] fol. 96v: Boetius et Tommas contra hoc; probant deum certo scire que per causas indeterminatas eveniunt.

[2] fol. 97r: Proprium deorum est prescire futura. Homines autem prescivend inde, scilicet, et illi, quibus et quatenus dii volunt significare. Unde si devitant presciendo que alioquin futura forent, hoc quoque ipsum est fatale. Similiter, si non devitant. Verum, o Plethon, frustra significant quando sic declinare non possunt. [que ante Homines del. Ficinus.]

[3] fol. 97v: Intellectus est dominus non simpliciter sed suorum, id est, interni populi sibi subditi. Ipse vero est domino subditus altiori. Item in vita voluptuosa vel practica sequitur externa, scilicet, pro modo nature exercitationisque sue, que duo sunt a deo. Ergo ductus agit.

[4] fol. 98r: Libertas tibi non diffinitur non necessitas quia divina necessitas foret servitus. Neque diffinitur nulli subici quia sic solus princeps foret liber. Sed diffinitur vivere ut vis, sive subiectus alicui sive non. Ergo qui bene, ut optat, vivit, vivit liber, etiam si pareat. [vivit ante optat del. Ficinus.]

[5] fol. 98v: Responde, o Plethon. Quo modo dii non sint cause peccatorum si, ut dicis, dii presciunt omnes futuros eventus certe quia per causas certas quas ipsi habent in seipsis, dum ipsi, videlicet, illorum sunt cause eosque disponunt in seipsis atque rebus? Item, si, ut dicis, animum aberrare quia sic et natura et consuetudine sit institutus, deos autem et naturam talem dedisse et opinionem sic exercitandi infudisse. Ergo, o Plethon, tibi ipsi repugnas.

APPENDIX 3: MARSILIO FICINO'S AUTOGRAPH ANNOTATIONS IN
NICOLAUS METHONENSIS'S REFUTATION OF PROCLUS'S
ELEMENTS OF THEOLOGY IN PARIS, BNF, MS GR. 1256

In his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, Ficino remarked (*Opera omnia*, p. 1171): 'Quomodo vero Platonicae rationes multitudinem primo tollentes, Christianae trinitati non detrahant, in qua, servata penitus simplicitate et unitate naturae, relatio quaedam sola quandam distinctionem facit, compositionem vero nullam, Nicolaus theologus Graecus Methones episcopus evidenter ostendit, at nos in annotationibus quibusdam in eum breviter designamus.' Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, I, p. clxiv, dates the annotations to 1490–92. Christian Förstel tells me that he would date the *Annotationes* to a time before 1490 (see his article in the forthcoming proceedings of the conference *Marsilio Ficino. Fonti, testi, fortuna*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, Firenze, 1–3 ottobre 1999). Ficino wrote his *Parmenides* commentary in the period 1490–96 (Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, I, p. cxix).

R = Nicholas of Methone, *Refutation of Proclus' 'Elements of Theology'*. A *Critical Edition with an Introduction on Nicholas' Life and Works*, ed. by Athanasios D. Angelou, Athens and Leiden, 1984.

P = Paris, BN, gr. 1256. According to Angelou, pp. xl and xlvii–li, P is a fourteenth-century manuscript and one of the three extant independent witnesses to Nicolaus's text. All the other manuscripts derive from one or other of these three. P and the other two independent witnesses (both also fourteenth-century manuscripts) constitute the basis of Angelou's edition. In addition to the marginal annotations, Ficino also added in the margins the arabic numerals 2, 4, 5–8 next to the start of the corresponding proposition of Proclus quoted by Nicholas. On this manuscript, see Kristeller, *Marsilio Ficino and His Work*, p. 98; Martin Sicherl, 'Neuentdeckte Handschriften von Marsilio Ficino und Johannes Reuchlin', *Scriptorium*, 16 (1962), pp. 50–61, at p. 61, no. 22; and H. Omont, *Inventaire sommaire des manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, 4 vols, Paris, 1886–98, I, p. 277.

[1] P 2r, at R 4.3–18 (Preface), Ἀρχόμενος . . . ἀνακαθαίρουσιν: Dicit Proculum eravisse quia contradixerit sibi ipso, dicens omnem multitudinem participare omnino unitatem, deinde unitatem esse imparticipabilem. Item quia dixerit Unum ipsum extra omnem numerum esse; tamen dixerit primum Unum. Primum enim referri ad sequentia et cum illis coordinari.

[2] P 2r, at R 4.21 (Preface), Διονύσιον: Dionysius.

[3] P 2r, at R 4.21–30 (Preface): Dionysius dicit divinitas et unum est et tria; rursus quod neque unum neque tria numeralia, sed super hec et horum causa et mensura. [trinita ante divinitas del. Ficinus.]

[4] P 2r, at R 4.31–5.3: Trinitas divina non mensuratur numero neque participat unum. Hoc enim esse proprium numeri. Hec vero non est numerus.

[5] P 2r, at R 5.5–15: Nazanzenus dicit divinitas ex eo quod est unitas est et trinitas, et e contra, cum enim non caveat bonis, que ab ipsa fiunt, et fecunditas et per se mobile sint bona. Hec sunt in deo, id est. Si enim

deus infecundus sit, undenam fecunditas? Si immobilis, unde motus? Non enim ab alio principio cum non sint duo principii. Ergo in deo. Motus autem in deo dicit actualement efficaciam. Dicit ergo Nazanzenus: unitas ab initio in duitatem mota usque ad trinitatem extitit. Quia ergo unitas—et hec quidem fecunda et mobilis ex se—ideo trinitas; et quia trinitas non numeralis sed numeri causa et mensura, ideo est ipsum Unum super numerum et essentiam et intellectum. [substitit *[sic]* ante extitit *del. Ficinus.*]

[6] P 2r, at R 5.10–11: Nazanzenus.

[7] P 2v, at R 5.20–6.6: Trinitas divina est super omnem multitudinem, etiam que possit effingi. Ideo non includitur in ea propositione que dicit omnis multitudo etc. [*sc., prop. 1 Procli Elementorum*] et non participat unius sed est ipsum unum, immo super unum in quantum quod contradiditit [*sc., ἀντιδιαιρέται*] multitudini. Propositio Proculi sequitur de multitudine [*sc., prop. 5*], que opponitur uni, et de uno, quod opponitur multitudini. Talia enim coordinantur; deus vero non coordinatur. [*m ante* multitudine *del. Ficinus*; *contradi ante* que *del. Ficinus.*]

[8] P 3r, at R 6.17–21: Dionysius dicit animam habere intellectum, quo percipiat intelligibilia, et unitatem intellectu superiorem, qua ineffabili modo uniatu divine unitati, que est super intellectum et super intelligibilia.

[9] P 3r, at R 7.6–8: Divina trinitas non participat unitatem. Ipsa enim est et ipsa unitas; et ipsa trinitas formaliter principium omnis unionis et numeri in rebus.

[10] P 3v, at R 7.23–24: In trinitate divina et qualibet persona est ipsum unum; et trinitas est ipsum unum.

[11] P 3v, at R 8.4–16: In trinitate unio non facit confusionem personarum nec harum differentia facit separationem. Neque dicendum est trinitatem esse aliquid unitum, sed esse et ipsum unum et ipsam trinitatem super essentiam, non solum super numerum quantitativum et super compositionem essentialem, et esse super omnem unionem et divisionem in rebus excogitabilem. Et cum causa omnium existens super omnia, nullis coordinetur. Non cadit in hanc propositionem connumeranda inter omnia unita, id est, quando dicitur omne quod est unitum etc. [*sc., prop. 4 Procli.*]. [personarum *ante* facit *del. Ficinus.*]

[12] P 4r, at R 8.23–27: Dicimus ipsam unitatem in deo esse ipsam trinitatem, non dividentes ipsum unum propter trinitatem neque confundentes trinitatem propter unitatem essentialem, immo superessentialem.

[13] P 4v, at R 9.17–29: Quod omnis multitudo sit post unum sequitur de multitudine que distincta est ab uno et illius particeps et coordinatur vel comparatur aliquo modo cum uno. Sed in deo ipsa trinitas est ipsa unitas, atque id ipsum est super omnem unitatem et multitudinem coordinabilem et econtra distinctam.

[14] P 4v at R 10.3–4: Unitatum multitudinem Proculus intelligit deorum numerum.

[15] P 5r at R 10.8–17: Ubi multitudo est, res separata ab ipsa unitate; verum est quod componitur ex unitatibus vel unitis. Sed divinitas eadem est tum unitas, tum trinitas. In qua trinitate est una essentia, potentia, actus, voluntas, sed per solas proprietates hypostaticas est distinctio.

APPENDIX 4: A MARGINAL COMMENT OF MARSILIO FICINO
ON CHALCIDIUS IN MILAN, BIBLIOTECA AMBROSIANA, MS S 14 SUP.

This manuscript carries on fol. 172r the colophon: 'Hic liber est Marsilii magistri Fecini, et ipse Marsilius eum scripsit mense Februarii et Martii anno 1454' (Florentine style; therefore 1455), under which Ficino inscribed his coat of arms (an upside-down sword with a star on either side). See Kristeller, *Marsilio Ficino and his Work after Five Hundred Years*, pp. 93-94, and *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Mostra*, pp. 7-8, no. 6, for literature.

Fol. 91r, at the end of a long doxographical note which begins in the margin of fol. 90v, next to p. 287.4 of Chalcidius, ed. Waszink (in the section which comments on *Timaeus*, 47E3-5, translated at 273.7-9, and to which Waszink gives the title '<De Silva>'):

Opiniones de materia.

Ignis: Eraclitus et Timaeus. Aerā [sic] Anaximenes, et Anaximander: terra.
Aqua: Tales . . . Democritus: infinita corpora individua. Trismegistus, Pittagoras,
Philolaus, Numenius, Plato et Aristoteles, Stoici de materia idem duxerunt.

One finds a similar sort of list in the fourteenth-century MS 581 of the Biblioteca Riccardiana, Florence, where on the lower margin of fol. 62r in Macrobius's commentary on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, Ficino wrote at roughly the same time (mid-1450s): 'Trismegistus, Pittagoras, Xenophanes, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Parmenides, Mellisus, Virgilius aiunt nihil in mundo interire sed variari' (reproduced in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Mostra*, tav. II/a-3). On fol. 1v, MS 581 bears Ficino's autograph ex-libris: 'Hic liber est Marsilii Ficini (ex Fecini mutavit Marsilius)', followed by his coat of arms. See Kristeller, *Ficino after Five Hundred Years*, p. 85; *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Mostra*, pp. 3-4, no. 3; and esp. G. B. Alberti, 'Marsilio Ficino e il codice Riccardiano 581', *Rinascimento*, 2a ser., 10 (1970), pp. 187-93.

INTELLECT AND WILL IN MARSILIO FICINO
TWO CORRELATIVES OF A RENAISSANCE
CONCEPT OF THE MIND¹

Tamara Albertini

In paintings and buildings . . . there shines the plan and the wisdom of the artist. Furthermore, one sees therein the disposition and somehow the shape of the soul itself. Thus the soul expresses and pictures itself in these works the way the face of a man contemplating himself in a mirror pictures itself in the mirror. However, the artist's soul comes to light most clearly in speech, songs, and sounds. In these the entire disposition of the mind and the will are clearly outlined.²

Marsilio Ficino states in quite unambiguous terms that the harmonious 'disposition' which the artist's soul introduces into paintings, buildings, and music is not solely a rationally or intellectually defined component that could be reduced to mere numbers and proportions. In the soul's self-expression as found in works of art one also discerns a manifestation of the will.³ Knowing the aesthetics of the Florentine philosopher—who traces the artist's creation to a process originating in the mind (*mens*)⁴—one can then infer that all 'products' of the mind, whether artistic or solely cognitive in nature, also bear

¹ The present article is a revised English version of the last sections in my book *Marsilio Ficino. Das Problem der Vermittlung von Denken und Welt in einer Metaphysik der Einfachheit*, Munich, 1997, pp. 231–50.

² Marsilio Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne de l'immortalité des âmes*, ed. and tr. by Raymond Marcel, 3 vols, Paris, 1964–70, X.4 (II, pp. 69–70): 'In picturis . . . aedificiisque consilium et prudentia lucet artificis. Dispositio praeterea et quasi figura quaedam animi ipsius inspicitur. Ita enim seipsum animus in operibus istis exprimit et figurat, ut vultus hominis intuentis in speculum seipsum figurat in speculo. Maxime vero in sermonibus, cantibus atque sonis artificiosus animus se depromit in lucem. In his enim tota mentis dispositio et voluntas planissime designatur.'

³ On the origin of the concept of will see E. Benz, *Die Entwicklung des abend-ländischen Willensbegriffes von Plotin bis Augustin*, Stuttgart, 1931; Neal W. Gilbert, 'The Concept of Will in Early Latin Philosophy', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 1 (1963), pp. 17–35.

⁴ For Ficino's aesthetics see Giovanni Solinas, 'Sull'estetica di M. Ficino', *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere, Filosofia e Magistero dell'Università di Cagliari*, 18 (1957), pp. 365–80;

the imprint of the soul's voluntative power. Does this make the will an epistemic faculty? How could it then be distinguished from the intellect, or, what function(s) does it serve that the intellect could not assume? And, finally, how is one to conceive of the relationship between intellect and will?

1. *The Medieval Debate Utrum intellectus sit nobilior quam voluntas*

The first to give serious thought to the difficulty of this relationship in the work of the Florentine philosopher and also to connect it to the medieval debate *utrum intellectus sit nobilior quam voluntas* was Paul Oskar Kristeller. His *Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* (1943) discusses the problem at length.⁵ Later on, he took up the same problem again in 'A Thomist Critique of Marsilio Ficino's Theory of Will and Intellect' (1965) and in *Le Thomisme et la pensée italienne de la Renaissance* (1967).⁶ Both publications shed light on the original medieval setting of the *intellectus-voluntas* controversy and how it was passed on to the Renaissance, partly through the writings of early humanists such as Petrarch and Salutati. The article 'A Thomist Critique' offers in addition a nearly complete listing of all textual evidence on the problem in Ficino's work. One important text, however, was omitted, Ficino's commentary on the *Timaeus*. This is an unfortunate omission since that commentary presents Ficino's resolution of the medieval dilemma.

André Chastel, *Marsilio Ficino et l'art*, Geneva and Lille, 1954; repr. Geneva 1975 and 1996; the chapter on 'The Idea of Beauty' in Michael J. B. Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of his 'Phaedrus' Commentary, its Sources and Genesis*, Berkeley etc., 1984, pp. 185–203; and the chapter on 'Icastic Art' in Michael J. B. Allen, *Icastics: Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's 'Sophist'*, Berkeley etc., 1989, pp. 117–67; Albertini, *Marsilio Ficino*, p. 85 ff.; and Tamara Albertini, 'Marsilio Ficino', in *Ästhetik und Kunstphilosophie von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. by Julian Nida-Rümelin and Monika Betzler, Stuttgart, 1998, pp. 269–74.

⁵ Paul O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by Virginia Conant, New York, 1943; repr. Gloucester, Mass., 1964, pp. 256–88. This work, originally written in German, was planned as a *Habilitation* to be submitted under the academic patronage of Martin Heidegger in Freiburg i. Br. in the late 1930s.

⁶ Paul O. Kristeller, 'A Thomist Critique of Marsilio Ficino's Theory of Will and Intellect', in *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume*, English Section, 2, Jerusalem, 1965, pp. 463–94, and Kristeller, *Le Thomisme et la pensée italienne de la Renaissance*, Montreal and Paris, 1967, pp. 93–125.

Before discussing how Ficino resolved that dilemma—mainly by embedding it in a new epistemological context and thereby essentially transforming the original inquiry—one should be aware of what was at stake in the medieval debate. Connected with the controversy whether the intellect or the will is superior was the issue of happiness (*beatitudo* or *felicitas*). The underlying question was whether happiness is to be gained through the intellectual or the volunative faculty. Far-reaching consequences ensue depending on which of the two positions is taken. If intellectual contemplation is the answer, then divine guidance (*lumen gloriae*) is needed to make up for the weakness of the human mind. In this scenario human autonomy appears diminished, since the mind is ultimately helpless without God's epistemic intervention. If, on the contrary, an innate inclination, i.e., the will, is to be entrusted with reaching happiness, then the attainment of it is within everyone's reach, provided the will's striving is not deficient and that the will is not misled in its choice of the ultimate aim of its desire.⁷ These are roughly the two chief positions in respect of the *intellectus-voluntas* debate. The first position, the 'intellectualistic' one, was represented by Thomas Aquinas and the Dominican school, the second, 'voluntaristic' in nature, found its defenders in Duns Scotus and the Franciscan order. A more detailed discussion of the arguments involved on both sides would doubtless bring to light many more aspects requiring consideration. It would emerge that Thomas Aquinas (unlike later Dominicans) did concede the will a limited superiority depending on the object of its striving. For instance, since loving God is worthier than knowing him (and if God is the ultimate end of one's desire), the will is to be considered the nobler faculty.⁸ Further analysis would also have to establish whether the two religious orders were dealing with precisely the same notion of will and thus whether an appropriate basis of comparison is in fact possible.⁹ For the present discussion, it will suffice

⁷ An interesting side issue to be examined in this context is whether the will possesses pre-knowledge of the objects of its striving.

⁸ Cf. Kristeller, 'Thomist Critique', p. 479. William of Thierry, with his equal appreciation for intellect and will, seems to have been the exception in the medieval philosophical landscape: 'hoc enim idem est habere vel frui, quod intelligere vel amare'; 'Amor quippe Dei ipse intellectus eius est; qui non nisi amatus intelligitur, nec nisi intellectus amatur, et utique tantum intelligitur quantum amatur, tantumque amatur, quantum intelligitur' (quoted from Pierre Rousselot, *Pour l'histoire du problème de l'amour au Moyen Age*, Münster, 1908, pp. 96, 98).

⁹ See Johannes Auer, *Die menschliche Willensfreiheit im Lehrsystem des Thomas von Aquin*

to keep in mind the basic doctrinal differences between the Dominican and the Franciscan positions, since both lines of arguments appear in several of Ficino's works, where he sometimes insists on the superiority of the intellect and at other times pronounces himself in favor of the supremacy of the will.

That Ficino was well aware of the debate emerges as early as the *De voluptate* of 1457. Although the actual notion of the will is only vaguely outlined, one finds here a correlation between happiness and what can be generally rendered as 'rational desire'. For instance, the description of the pleasure of the mind (*voluptas mentis*) invoked there anticipates the later definition of the function of the will as that which finds its fulfilment in uniting itself with the object of its striving.¹⁰ In Ficino's mature period there is hardly a work of his that does not address the issue of the superiority of the intellect and the will in one way or another—at times defending the latter, at others the former. Besides, one knows how intensively the *intellectus-voluntas* controversy was discussed in his immediate circle of friends and patrons. For instance, Alamanno Donati, a disciple of Ficino's, compiled a treatise in which he assembled the major arguments used by the two opposing positions without opting for either.¹¹ Then there is the great Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who belonged to the *confabulatores* in Ficino's academy: unlike the Florentine philosopher, he unequivocally agreed with the Thomist stand.¹² Furthermore, it

und Johannes Duns Scotus, Munich, 1938, p. 108, and Walter Hoeres, *Der Wille als reine Vollkommenheit nach Duns Scotus*, Munich, 1962, pp. 222–23.

¹⁰ *De voluptate*, XIII, in *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basel, 1576; repr. Turin, 1959 etc., p. 1005 f.: '... eius, autem, quo animus fruitor, gaudii subiectum quidem mens, obiectum, res incorporea, simplex, absoluta, aeterna, veritasque existit, quo igitur huius, quam superioris illius voluptatis principia diviniore sunt, eo haec est, quam illa perfectior... mens autem intimam atque absolutam naturam eius, quod obiectum est, inspicit, atque ita cum eo, quod considerat copulatur, ut vel e duobus unum... fiat, vel... indissolubili connexionem cohaereant, qua comprehensione, coniunctioneque maior admodum menti, quam sensibus, qui id assequi nequeunt, voluptas contingit.' In Ficino's major work, the *Theologia Platonica*, there is a passage that explicitly links will and pleasure of the mind. The latter is considered the result of the will's expansion into the Good: 'Ubi non est voluntas, quae est inclinatio mentis ad bonum, ibi non est mentis voluptas, quae est dilatatio voluntatis in bonum et quies voluntatis in bono' (Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne*, II.11 [ed. Marcel, I, p. 111]).

¹¹ Alamanno Donati, 'De intellectus voluntatisque excellentia', ed. by Lamberto Borghi, *La Bibliofilia*, 42 (1940), pp. 108–15.

¹² 'Beatitudo est essentialiter in actu intellectus. Correlarium. Nec fruitio, nec aliquis actus voluntatis, est essentialiter beatitudo' ('Conclusiones secundum Thomam

is well documented that Ficino and his patron Lorenzo de' Medici discussed this problem somewhere between 1473 and 1474 and that they both at that time favored the will over the intellect. The philosopher expressed his views on the matter in the *Epistola de felicitate*, the patron in his poem *L'Altercazione*. Both their positions provoked in turn the reaction of Vincenzo Bandello, the later general of the Dominican order, who gathered his arguments in defense of the Thomist position in the treatise *Quod beatitudo hominis in actu intellectus et non voluntatis essentialiter consistit*.¹³ Finally, one needs to consider Ficino's many correspondents who asked him to clarify his position in respect to the superiority of the intellect and the will—since it seems to have changed several times over the years. It is beyond doubt that the dilemma *intellectus versus voluntas* was of great importance to Ficino and his circle, but it remains to be shown whether he addressed it in the terms defined by his medieval predecessors.

Regarding Ficino's shifting attitude in deciding the supremacy question, Kristeller distinguished three different periods: An early phase in which the philosopher gives his preference to the intellect, to which the first version of the *Philebus* commentary bears testimony; a middle phase that witnesses the privileging of the will as expressed in the *Epistola de felicitate* and to a great extent in the *Theologia Platonica*; and finally a late phase that leads to a conciliatory position in which the two powers are seen as equivalent faculties. This view can be found in the late version of the *Philebus* commentary, in the famous letter to Paolo Orlandini, and in the commentary on the *Timaeus*.¹⁴ The following analysis draws on this tripartite division, except for the addition of Ficino's *Timaeus* commentary.

no. 12', in Pico's *Conclusiones sive theses DCCCC Romae anno 1486 publice disputandae, sed non admissae*, ed. by B. Kieszowski, Geneva, 1973, p. 29). One must also consider the Scotist theses, particularly the following: 'Actus intelligendi nobiliori modo causatur ab intellectu quam ab obiecto, quodcumque sit obiectum, modo non sit beatificum' ('Conclusiones secundum Ioannem Scotum no. 20', *ibid.*, p. 32).

¹³ Published in Kristeller, 'Thomist Critique', pp. 487–94. As Kristeller points out, Bandello argues in his treatise as if Ficino had defended the primacy of the will alone.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 474–76.

2. *The Early Philebus Commentary: The Intellect as the Perfecter of All Things*

One of the earliest documents in which Ficino explicitly discusses the relationship of intellect and will is his first version of the *Philebus* commentary, where he explores the basis of the ethical life. The position outlined in this work is unmistakably one that privileges the intellect.¹⁵ In the introduction to his critical edition and translation of the text, Michael J. B. Allen points out that this is in harmony with the Thomist position according to which the 'truly ethical life is intellectual'.¹⁶ Of several arguments in Ficino's *Philebus* commentary the systematically most striking is that:

the intellect draws things towards itself. The will is drawn away by things. For the intellect doesn't conceive of things as they are in themselves, rather it conceives of things in its own way, the many in terms of the one species, changing things in terms of stability, single things in terms of the universal and so on. With its own formulae¹⁷ it rectifies what is defective in things. But the will is drawn towards possessing things as they are in themselves. It is swept towards them by a notion which has been conceived of them. It doesn't alter them; but it is itself altered from a state of rest to one of motion.¹⁸

Given Ficino's epistemology, which emphasizes the human ability to 'restore' reality,¹⁹ as it were, to a more 'mindlike', i.e., generic, motionless, and, therefore, more perfect condition, it becomes clear that the explanation offered above is one that introduces the intellect as the superior faculty. Whereas the will appears dependent and at the mercy of things that continuously affect it, the intellect is endowed with transformative powers ensuring its dominion over things: it

¹⁵ This was categorically denied by Giuseppe Saitta, who maintains that in the *Philebus* commentary Ficino privileges the will at the expense of rationality (*Marsilio Ficino e la filosofia dell'Umanesimo*, 3rd edn, Bologna, 1954, p. 50).

¹⁶ Marsilio Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. and tr. by Michael J. B. Allen, Berkeley etc., 1975, p. 37.

¹⁷ For these innate *formulae* (or *sigilla*) as the reflection of divine ideas, see Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. Allen, p. 33 ff., and Albertini, *Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 141–45.

¹⁸ Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ch. 37, p. 370 f: 'ille [intellectus] res ad se trahit; ista [voluntas] a rebus trahitur. Nam ille non ut res in seipsis sunt eas concipit, sed modo suo multa in una specie, mobilia stabiliter, singula universaliter, et cetera, et quae claudicant in rebus, formulis suis dirigit. Haec autem inclinatur ad res ita possidendas ut in seipsis sunt, rapiturque ad eas notione concepta, nec mutat eas, sed mutatur e statu in motum.'

¹⁹ Cf. Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne*, XVI.3 (ed. Marcel, III, p. 118).

unifies, universalizes and corrects things to match its inborn *formulae*. As Kristeller phrased it, 'the intellect assimilates the objects to itself; the will assimilates itself to the objects'.²⁰ Nevertheless, even though the description of the will in the *Philebus* commentary is aimed at diminishing its epistemic value *vis-à-vis* the intellect's performance, an important voluntative function emerges, namely, the will's moving toward external objects. This is a function that Ficino uses in his later works in order to reassess the will's position.

Among the other arguments adduced in the *Philebus* commentary one finds that the will is subordinate to the intellect, since the latter possesses judgement. Next, not only does the will not distinguish between true and alleged happiness, but it is not even able to assert its own striving. Further, the intellect's activity is always beneficial, whether it knows good or evil, whereas desiring evil is an evil in itself. Besides, the ultimate end is not to love and desire *per se*, 'but the end of a rational substance is God',²¹ and God is reached by virtue of the soul's capacity for intellectual contemplation. Finally, the will alone is blind and without orientation: 'For we are unable to want something until we understand what we want.'²²

3. *The Epistola de felicitate and the Theologia Platonica: The Triumph of the Will*

The *Epistola de felicitate* addressed to Lorenzo de' Medici takes a view diametrically opposed to the one Ficino had developed in the *Philebus* commentary. He reminds his patron of a conversation held in Careggi during which they had both defended the supremacy of the will (and praises him for having proposed new arguments, without, however, specifying what these were). Surprisingly, one finds the same statements as in the earlier *Philebus* commentary, except that the evaluations are reversed. Intellect and will are still performing the same functions (one operates inwardly, the other outwardly); however, the will is now the leading power:

²⁰ Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, p. 272.

²¹ Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. Allen, ch. 37, p. 378 f.: 'Finis autem substantiae rationalis est Deus.'

²² Ibid.: 'Nam velle non possumus, nisi est quod intelligimus.'

It follows that a turn of the will . . . is more truly based on goodness itself than an intellectual concept which remains something purely internal. For the intellect grasps the object by a kind of imagery, but will strives to transfer itself to its object by natural impulse.²³

In addition, the letter nowhere mentions that the intellect transforms the world according to its own terms and is, therefore, to be considered the nobler faculty. Instead, Ficino emphasizes the fact that the striving of the will is all directed towards the external world. It is accordingly better equipped to reach the Good (which by definition lies outside itself) than the intellect, which just recreates the world in its own image. As a result, Ficino shifts his attention from the contemplation of knowledge to the joy (*gaudium*) attainable through the will:

we desire to see [i.e., to know] in order to rejoice; we do not seek to rejoice in order to see . . . We do not desire simply to see, but to see those things that make us rejoice, in a way that makes us rejoice;

and

Joy is richer than cognition, for not every man that knows rejoices, but those who rejoice necessarily know.²⁴

These statements embrace an idea that could have been used in support of the intellect's superiority, since it is capable of cognizance without the participation of the will (even though it would then be like a living being deprived of the sense of taste, says Ficino),²⁵ whereas the joy experienced by the will necessarily implies intellectual activity. Yet this is to neglect the actual argument being made, which aims at an integral understanding of the two powers. The intellect allows for cognition only. The will, however, rewards one with cognition and joy and so reveals itself as the more formidable

²³ Ficino, *Opera omnia*, p. 663 f.: 'conversio voluntatis . . . verius ipso bono statuatur, quam notio intellectus quae manet intus. Intellectus enim modo quodam imaginario obiectum capit. Voluntas essentiali instinctu transferre se nititur in obiectum.' English text from *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, 6 vols to date, London, 1975-, I, p. 175.

²⁴ Ficino, *Opera omnia*, p. 663: 'Non cupimus ipsum videre simpliciter, sed talia et tali quodam pacto videre ut gaudemus;' and 'Plenius est gaudium, quam cognitio, non enim quisquis cognoscit, idem simul et gaudet, quisquis autem gaudet, necessario et cognoscit.' English translation from Ficino, *Letters*, I, p. 174.

²⁵ *Opera omnia*, p. 664.

force. Most obviously, that faculty is to be preferred which includes in its own operations the workings of the other faculty as well.

Among the numerous other arguments made in the *Epistola*, two emerge as being of particular interest. They are both related to the joy derived from the possession of God. This takes us back to the central issue of happiness, which Ficino (following the traditional identification of God and the Good) defines in the *Epistola* as 'the highest act of the highest faculty in respect to the highest Good'.²⁶ The question turns on knowing by what faculty the highest Good can be reached. If it is indeed the will, then its ultimate supremacy is ensured. Here is Ficino's argument:

in investigating God, we take a long time to make very little progress, but by loving Him we make much progress in a very short time. The reason love unites the mind with God more swiftly, closely and firmly than cognition is that the power of cognition lies mainly in making distinctions but the power of love lies in union.²⁷

The will's superiority manifests itself precisely when God is the object of understanding. Whereas the intellect's acuity allows for separation (between itself and the object of its cognizance), the will succeeds in attaining God by virtue of its desire for union with the object of its longing. Besides, continues Ficino, contemplating the Good does not make one good *per se*; to love the Good, however, compels the soul to become good itself.²⁸

The second argument demonstrating the will's superiority in the context of the cognition of God rests on the notion of infinity:

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 662: 'beatitudo sit summus actus summae potentiae circa obiectum summum'.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 663: 'perscrutando Deum paulum longo vix tandem tempore proficimus, amando brevissimo plurimum, ob id enim citius propinquiusque et firmiter amor, quam cognitio mentem cum divinitate coniungit, quia vis cognitionis *in discretionem* [*in discretionem edn*] consistit magis amoris autem vis magis *in unionem*' (italics mine; English translation from Ficino, *Letters*, I, p. 174). Ficino repeats shortly thereafter the same idea: 'Cum vis cognitionis, ut supra diximus, *in quadam discretionem* consistat, vis autem amoris *in unionem*, propius unimur Deo per amatorium gaudium quod nos transformat in amatum Deum, quam per cognitionem' (*Opera omnia*, p. 663 f.; italics mine). One also finds him applying the terms *discretio* and *unio* to intellect and will in *Théologie platonicienne*, XIV.10 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 291). A similar idea is expressed in Ficino's *Symposium* commentary: 'Quod ergo nos celo restituit non dei cognitio est, sed amor', *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, ed. and tr. by Raymond Marcel, Paris, 1956, IV.6, p. 176.

²⁸ Cf. *Opera omnia*, p. 663.

by cognizing God, we reduce His size to the capacity and understanding of our mind; but by loving Him we enlarge our mind to the immeasurable breadth of divine goodness. By the first we bring God down to our own scale, by the second we raise ourselves to God.²⁹

This statement clarifies from another angle why intellectual power alone necessarily fails in its attempt to understand God (or the Good). The intellect is a faculty that transforms its objects. It does not cognize them the way they are in themselves, but according to its own mode.³⁰ The otherwise impressive epistemic subjectivity that arises from this ability becomes counterproductive if the object of cognizance is God: it reverts to its opposite. This is not to say that the intellect's contemplation is then obscured. Quite to the contrary, its greatest obstacle comes precisely from its 'clarity',³¹ which contracts any of its objects to its own finite dimensions. Therefore, the infinite object 'God' cannot be reached through an act of the intellect but through the will's loving striving, which expands the mind to receive the divine in its immeasurability. Only that faculty that assimilates itself to the object of its desire is in a position to open up to God's infinity and shape itself accordingly as an infinite entity itself. Ficino calls this act *conversio*, a turning by which the entire soul transforms itself into the object of the will's desire.

For this reason an act of the will, which is the *turning* towards and diffusion of the substantial into the infinite God, partakes more of the infinite than an act of the intellect, which is conception of God according to the mind's capacity. Therefore God is the greatest Good. Bliss is the enjoyment of God and we enjoy God through will. Through will we move towards God by loving Him, and by being joyful we are enlarged and *turned* towards Him.³²

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 664: 'cognoscendo Deum, eius amplitudinem contrahimus ad mentis nostrae capacitatem atque conceptum: amando vero mentem amplificamus ad latitudinem divinae bonitatis immensam. Illic in nos Deum quasi deiicimus, hic vero attollimus nos ad Deum.' English translation from Ficino, *Letters*, I, p. 176. For a similar explanation in Ficino's major work, see *Théologie platonicienne*, XIV.10 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 292), and 'De raptu Pauli', in *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, ed. by Eugenio Garin, Milan and Naples, 1952, pp. 932–69 at p. 958 f.

³⁰ For a comparison with Kantian philosophy, see Albertini, *Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 134–47 and 173–76.

³¹ For the notion of *claritas intellectus*, see Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne*, VII.3 (ed. Marcel, I, p. 297).

³² *Opera omnia*, p. 664 f.: 'Quocirca voluntatis actus, qui est in Deum infinitum *conversio* substantialisque diffusio, rationem infinitatis magis habet, quam actus intelligendi qui est Dei notio quaedam pro mentis capacitate. Summum igitur bonum

Clearly, the will emerges as the victorious faculty in the *Epistola*. However, since both faculties are instrumental in reaching the Good, Ficino—borrowing a motif from the *Phaedrus*—calls them the ‘wings of the soul’,³³ thereby suggesting a somehow equivalent relationship between the two.

Criteria for establishing the will’s superiority, independently of whether God or things are the object of cognition, can also be traced in Ficino’s major work, the *Theologia Platonica*, written between 1469 and 1474. How far he had moved away from his earliest position becomes particularly apparent from the way he turns an argument originally (in the first version of the *Philebus* commentary) made in favor of the intellect to serve now to privilege the will. According to a chapter in the fourteenth book of the *Theologia Platonica*, both intellect and will strive to become everything, though they do not perform the same operations. The difference is by now familiar: the intellect applies its universalizing mode, which internalizes all cognitive objects, whereas the will is entirely drawn towards the particularity of things outside itself.³⁴ Despite the neutral language used

Deus est. Beatitudo autem fructio Dei, fruimur ideo per voluntatem. Quoniam per eam amando quidem movemur ad Deum, gaudento vero dilatamur *convertimurque* in Deum.’ English translation from Ficino, *Letters*, I, p. 177. *Conversio* and its cognates appear several times in an earlier paragraph: ‘Fructio boni in sensu, non in eo consistit proprie quod bonum moveat sensum, sed in eo quod sensus in bonum illud quod oblatum est sese reflectat, *convertatur* et diffundatur. Quae quidem spiritalis *conversio* diffusioque nihil est aliud quam voluptas, ut in libro De voluptate disseruimus. Sic in separata mente ipsa, ut ita loquar, fructio Dei non in eo proprie quod Deus se monstrat menti consistit, hic etiam Dei potius, quam noster actus est, sed in eo quod mens *se convertit* in Deum, quod est gaudium. Neque putandum est, animam in Dei visionem *sese convertere* ut quiescat in ipsa, sed in Deum visum, vult enim visionem propter visum, quod etiam ipsi tanquam forma coniungitur’ (ibid.). See also the quotation in note 23, and Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet*, IV, 2, p. 169 and IV, 4, p. 172. It would be worth examining whether Ficino’s notion of *conversio* influenced Campanella’s *immutatio*, which is discussed, for instance, in his *Metafisica (Universalis Philosophiae seu metaphysicarum rerum iuxta propria dogmata libri xxx)*, lib. VI, cap. VIII, art. IV, tr. by Giovanni di Napoli, Bologna, 1967, II, p. 124 f.

³³ *Opera omnia*, p. 663. See the beginning of *De Christiana religione*, which also speaks of intellect and will as the wings of the soul (ibid., p. 1). For the theme of the wings, see also the letter to Giovanni Nesi, ibid., p. 775, and Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne*, XIV.3 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 259). For a discussion of Ficino’s various ‘allegorizations’ of the Platonic wings, see Allen, *Platonism of Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 210–12, 217, 223 f.

³⁴ Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne*, XIV.3 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 258 f.): ‘Utraque [enim] fiunt [quidem] omnia, intellectus omnia vera, voluntas omnia bona, sed intellectus res in seipsum transferendo illis unitur, voluntas contra in res transferendo seipsam. Quonam pacto? Sane noster intellectus modo suo potius res intelligit quam pro

in describing the distinctive features of the two faculties, Ficino does end up expressing his preference for the will, but this only becomes clear if one pays attention to the example he introduces to illustrate his point. The intellect, says Ficino, is content with the universal and incorporeal notion of gold, while the will 'wants this particular and corporeal gold, as it is in itself'.³⁵ To make it clearer: who in his right mind would prefer the idea of gold to gold itself? The will with its emphasis on things as they are in themselves is clearly more precious.

A similar conclusion emerges from another passage in the *Theologia Platonica*, in which the superiority of the will becomes apparent only towards the end. Ficino maintains in that passage that both faculties deal with Being as such, except that the intellect examines it under the aspect of Truth and the will under the aspect of the Good.³⁶ Despite their different angles there emerges a similarity between the two powers in that they both have a predisposition to universality. Whereas there is 'universal Truth' in the intellect, the will is characterized by 'an inclination towards the universal Good'.³⁷ So far, neither of the two faculties appears to be superior, until one finds the following statement:

natura rerum. Formas utique corporum, quae sunt particulares, materiae immer-sae, divisae, confusae, infectae ac mobiles intelligit modo quodam universali, absoluto, simplici, distincto, puro et stabili. Deum vero et angelos, qui stabiles sunt et simplices, mobili ut plurimum et multiplici discursione. Ita intellectus noster tam illa quae infra se, quam quae supra existunt, modo quodam percipit suo. Quam ob causam dicitur omnia in suam transferre naturam . . . Voluntas autem primo quidem non sicut intellectus in se permanet, sed animam et corpus movet ad operandum, ut ad res desideratas accedant, deinde non eo proprie modo quo res in anima insunt affectat, sed quo potius in seipsis.' This quotation seems at first to be in contradiction with an earlier passage in *Théologie platonicienne*, X.8 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 87): 'legitimus intellectus est ille qui res intelligit sicuti sunt, legitima voluntas illa quae res appetit sicuti sunt appetibiles. Sunt autem res ut ordinantur a Deo, appetibiles vero sunt ut ordinantur ad Deum. Ergo neque intellectus, neque voluntas in rebus ipsis quiescere potest. Sed ille resolvit in Deum, haec refert ad Deum.' However, the meaning of the passage above is that the intellect deals with the ontological order of things, an order which it traces back to God. The will follows the order of things inasmuch as they are desirable and, like the intellect, ends up referring things to God as the one who has ordered them.

³⁵ Ibid., XIV.3 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 259): 'Intellectui aurum cognituro species auri illa universalis et incorporea sufficit, voluntati vero non sufficit. Nam quantum ad humanam vitam spectat, aurum vult particulare istud et corporale, quale est in seipso.'

³⁶ Ibid., X.8 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 86): 'sicut obiectum intellectus est ens ipsum sub ratione veri, ita voluntatis obiectum ens ipsum sub ratione boni'. In the *Opuscula theologica*, the intellect assumes both functions: *ibid.*, III, p. 332.

³⁷ Ibid., X.8 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 87).

Understanding and loving you rise above any intellect to life itself, the essence itself, the absolute being itself, and understanding suffices you only if you understand the Good well.³⁸

The 'ascent' of the soul is rendered possible through the participation of both intellect and will. There is, however, no full cognizance without cognizance of the Good, which lies within the authority of the voluntative power. As in the *Epistola*, the loving union with the Good entails assimilation with God's infinity. This idea is expressed in strong terms in the *Theologia Platonica* where the Good is called the 'creator', that is, the shaper of the soul.³⁹

Passages in Ficino's major work that describe the acts of intellect and will in the context of the love of God do not require further interpretation: they all clearly give precedence to the will.⁴⁰ The arguments proposed are basically the same as those found in the *Epistola*. The main difference between the letter to Lorenzo and the *Theologia Platonica* is that the latter work does not explicitly bring up the question of superiority, and the issue of happiness is hardly mentioned in it. Clearly, rather than establishing an opposition between intellect and will themselves in his major work (which would bring up the problem of the possible dominion of one faculty over the other), Ficino is more interested in how their respective operations complement each other despite their opposition.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 89: 'ad ipsam vitam, ad ipsam essentiam, ad ipsum esse absolutum intelligendo amandoque ascendis super quemlibet intellectum, neque satis tibi intelligentia est, nisi et bene et bonum intelligas'.

³⁹ *Ibid.*: 'Bonum igitur ipsum procreator tuus est, anima, non bonum corpus, non bonus animus, non bonus intellectus, sed bonum ipsum, bonum inquam, quod in seipso consistit extra subiecti cuiusque limites infinitum, infinitamque tibi tribuit vitam, vel ab aevo in aevum, vel saltem ab initio quodam in sempiternum.'

⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, XIV.10 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 291). One occasionally finds a few lines seemingly in support of the intellect: 'Non possumus autem Deo per intellectum similes effici, nisi Deum intelligendo, quippe cum quibuslibet aliis rebus intellectus tunc fiat similis, quando eas intelligendo se in earum imagines transfiguratur' (*ibid.*, XIV.2 [ed. Marcel, II, p. 250]). These, however, are usually followed by a statement restoring the will's precedence: 'Finis ergo noster est per intellectum Deum videre, per voluntatem viso Deo frui, quia summum bonum nostrum est summae potentiae nostrae obiectum summum sive actus perfectissimus circa ipsum' (*ibid.*).

4. *The Later Works: The Resolution of the Dilemma*

The turn taken in the *Theologia Platonica*, in considering intellect and will as two parallel rather than antagonistic forces, is further strengthened in Ficino's later works. It now becomes manifest that the volutative faculty is not just a higher type of 'natural appetite' or 'instinct'⁴¹ somehow contributing to cognizance. It is rather an epistemic force in its own right. According to Kristeller, for the publication of the *Philebus* commentary in 1496, Ficino actually toned down his intellectualist position in an insertion made towards the end of the first book:⁴²

The reasons expounded above have put the act of intellect in the happy man before the act of will. In an epistle on felicity I have tried to deal with the reasons that make the opposite view the more probable. Ultimately, perhaps the safer approach is not to think of the will as [something] cut off from the intellect, but to think of it and pleasure as though they were in the intellect itself.⁴³

In this passage Ficino also takes back the assurance expressed in the *Epistola* by describing his former defense of the will as a merely 'probable' opinion. The new position wishes to understand the will and the pleasure it dispenses as co-essential with the intellect.

An attempt to conceive of intellect and will along these lines can be seen in Ficino's letter of 13 November 1496 to his friend Paolo Orlandini, which was inserted among the chapters of his commentary on Plato's *Republic*.⁴⁴ Ficino first addresses Orlandini's concern about the flagrant contradiction between the positions developed in the early *Philebus* commentary and the *Epistola*. He could resolve the matter easily by stating that he was rendering Plato's position in the commentary, while he had felt free to express his own views in

⁴¹ On the *appetitus naturalis* as natural desire see Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 171–99, and Albertini, *Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 103–21. According to Allen, Ficino speaks more often of natural appetite than of will in the *Philebus* commentary in order to enhance the intellect's position (*The 'Philebus' Commentary*, p. 29).

⁴² Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, p. 274.

⁴³ Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ch. 37, p. 380 f.: 'Superiores quidem rationes intellectus actum actui voluntatis in beato praeposuerunt. Quibus vero rationibus oppositum probabiliter existimari possit in epistola quadam de foelicitate tractavimus. Denique si consideretur non tam voluntas ab intellectu discreta, quam quod in ipso intellectu est, quasi voluntas et voluptas, erit forte tentatio tutior.'

⁴⁴ The letter is edited and translated by Allen in Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, pp. 486–88.

the epistle to Lorenzo; but then 'the Marsilian view' would differ from Plato's . . .⁴⁵ Ultimately, however, the goal is to understand intellect and will as both equally originating in the mind:

So briefly I will reply that our intelligence proceeds in two ways: one natural, but the other supernatural, which might be referred to as the way of ecstasy. In the first case the intellect guides the will as a companion because of some naturally innate light. Eventually, when it has guided the will correctly, it satisfies it, and is therefore superior to it. In the second case, the case of ecstasy, however, a new light and power poured in by God doesn't fill the intellect with divine splendor until it has kindled the will with a wonderful love.⁴⁶

Ficino refers here to his theory of a double light (*lumen geminum*), one natural and innate, the other divine and infused.⁴⁷ The language he uses in the above passage appears mystical. The description suggests a veritable rapture of the mind as soon as it is touched by divine light. One wonders, however, whether one should think of a supernatural event, as if every cognitive act were accompanied by an ecstatic experience. As a matter of fact, a more careful reading of the Latin allows for a somewhat different interpretation. The cognitive movements of the intellect and the will are described as part of a double process ('duplex processus') of the mind, one of which is the 'excessus' of the will (the word translated above as 'ecstasy').⁴⁸ In order to gain a clearer understanding of the precise nature of the 'excessus', one ought also to consider the term used for the workings of the intellect. This term is provided in a further explanatory note of the same letter to Orlandini where Ficino states:

We have discussed the intelligence's natural process (*incessus*) in accordance with Plato in the *Philebus*; but we touch on the ecstasy which

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 486 f.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 486 f.: 'Itaque respondebo summam *duplicem* esse mentis nostrae *processum*: alterum quidem naturalem, alterum vero supra naturam, quem proprie nominamus *excessum*. In illo quidem processu intellectus luce quadam naturaliter insita voluntatem ducit quasi comitem; ac denique recte ductam implet, ideoque praefertur. In hoc autem *excessu* nova lux virtusque infusa divinitus non prius intellectum divino splendore complet quam amore mirifico accenderit voluntatem' (italics mine).

⁴⁷ Cf. Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet*, IV.4, p. 172. See also Ficino's treatise 'De raptu Pauli', p. 962.

⁴⁸ Kristeller also translates 'ecstasy'. Cf. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, p. 276, and also the original German version, *Die Philosophie des Marsilio Ficino*, Frankfurt a. M., 1972, p. 258.

is higher than the natural motion in the letter, and we have treated it in accordance with Plato in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*.⁴⁹

The 'natural' proceeding of the intelligence (i.e. of the mind) alluded to in the passage quoted can only mean the workings of the intellect. Its function is indeed to enfold cognitions into the depths of the mind, which is indicated by the prefix of the term '*incessus*'. It is obvious then that the *excessus* of the will acts as a movement that is complementary to the intellect's *incessus*. Technically speaking, it is the mind's outwardly operating cognitive ability that one knows already from the early *Philebus* commentary. The translation 'ecstasy' unnecessarily clouds Ficino's quite precise description of the mind's external proceeding. Rather than correlating this external proceeding with a mystical experience, it is more appropriate to think of a passion of the mind, a passion that Ficino attempted to rationalize by defining the will as its main carrier.⁵⁰ This passion does not only arise when the mind rushes to conjoin itself with the Good itself, it also occurs when Goodness is detected in things,⁵¹ which explains why for Ficino the acquisition of knowledge gives pleasure. It is his deep fascination with passion in an epistemological context that also accounts for his continuous use of love metaphors in describing the workings of the will.

The question of the relative precedence of will and intellect is entirely absent from a chapter of Ficino's commentary on the *Timaeus*, a work to which he gave special attention.⁵² The solution offered there as to how to conceptualize appropriately the relationship between

⁴⁹ Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. Allen, p. 488 f.: 'Naturalem quidem mentis *incessum* una cum Platone tractavimus in Philebo, *excessum* vero naturali motu superiorem attingimus in epistola atque una cum Platone in Phaedro Symposioque tetigimus' (italics mine).

⁵⁰ Sears R. Jayne also acknowledges the intellectual component of the will. To him, however, this has to do with Ficino's endeavor to rationalize tradition: 'Ficino's Latin term, *amor*, cleverly keeps the Christian flavor of *caritas*, but it is for him essentially an epistemological term meaning desire for truth; thus love, even when one identifies the Platonic Good with God, remains for Ficino essentially an intellectual rather than an emotional process. It is only by keeping everything on a purely intellectual level that Ficino succeeds in harmonizing so many different religious and philosophical points of view; the triumph of holding in the mind all at once the views of Plato, Christ, Plotinus, the Cabala, Zoroaster . . . is primarily an intellectual achievement', *John Colet and Marsilio Ficino*, Oxford, 1963, p. 59.

⁵¹ Cf. the second quotation in n. 34 above.

⁵² The early version of 1457 is lost. There followed, however, a second version in 1483 which Ficino revised in 1492. See Paul O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2 vols, Florence, 1937, I, pp. cxx-cxxi.

the two cognitive powers is set out in the context of Plato's harmonic triangle, also called the *lambda* figure after the triangular-shaped Greek letter. With the numbers used in that figure Ficino forms the following consonances (and assigns them to various deities):

9:8	sesquioctava (tone)	Muses
3:2	sesquialtera (diapente/fifth)	Venus
4:3	sesquitercia (diatesseron/fourth)	Mercury
2:1; 4:2; 8:4	dupla (diapason/octave)	Apollo
3:1; 9:3; 27:9	tripla (diapason diapente/octave and fifth)	Jupiter
4:1; 8:2	quadrupla (disdiapason/double octave)	Apollo ⁵³

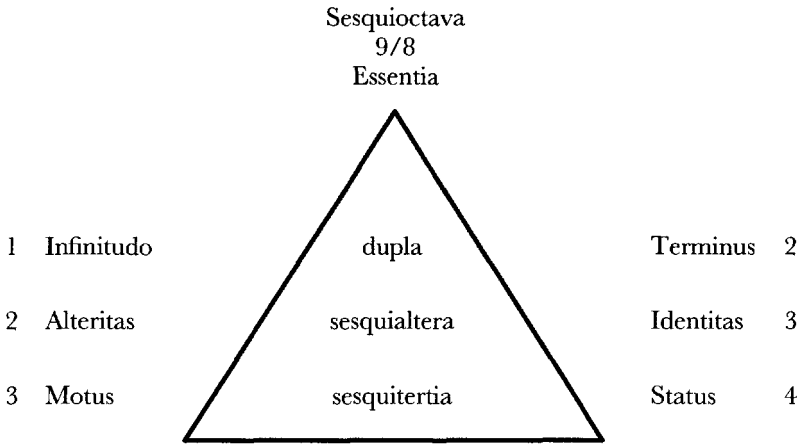
From these proportions Ficino chooses four consonances: the tone (9:8), the octave (2:1), the fifth (3:2), and the fourth (4:3) in order to construct yet another harmonic triangle. This selection seems at first to contradict Ficino's list of preferred consonances as developed in one of his earlier writings, the *Epistola de rationibus musicae*. In that *Epistola* the octave (2:1), the fifth (3:2) and the third (5:4) play a dominant role as constitutive intervals: the octave is considered a 'perfect', the fifth an 'almost perfect' and the third a 'soft harmony'.⁵⁴ It is, however, quite clear why the third could not be included in Ficino's harmonic triangle despite its high quality of consonance: the number 5 does not appear in the Platonic *lambda*. On the other hand, he could use the fourth (4:3), even though or rather because it is a lesser harmony. As the following will show, the fourth being partly consonant (in the tonal system) and partly dissonant (in the

⁵³ Ch. XXXIII, *Opera omnia*, p. 1459. See also Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne*, XVII.2 (ed. Marcel, III, p. 156), and Ficino's unpublished translation of Theon of Smyrna's *Expositio rerum mathematicarum ad legendum Platonem utilium*, Vatican City, MS Vat. lat. 4530, fol. 134r.

⁵⁴ 'Epistola de rationibus musicae', in Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, I, p. 51: 'Precipua . . . apud musicos est proportio dupla, que diapason scilicet octave vocis perfectam procreat consonantiam Calliopeo apud poetas nomine designatam. Secundo habetur loco proportio sexquialtera que diapente ipsam scilicet quinte vocis prope-modum perfectam efficit harmoniam, cui quidem numero poeta lyricus Venereum tribuit nectar. Tertio sexquiquarta, ex qua vocis tertie lenis nascitur harmonia Cupidinem referens et Adonem, quarto sexquitercia per quam vox iam quarta resultat quasi inter consonantem dissonantemque media nescio quid Martii Venereo miscens. Precipue vero tertia, quinta, octava ceteris gratiores tris nobis Gratias referent.'

composition) fits perfectly in a scheme of gradually diminishing harmonic ratios.⁵⁵

This is how Ficino then orders his consonances along the sides of a new *lambda* figure; the first step has him correlate these with Plato's highest *genera*:



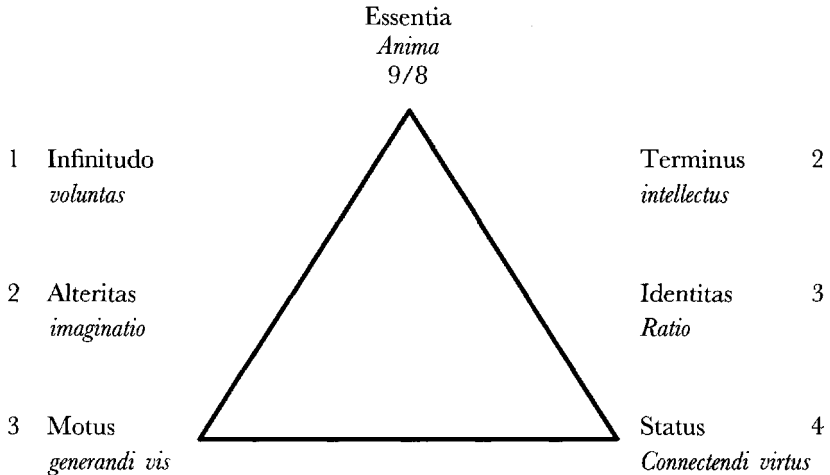
(after the *Timaeus* commentary, ch. XXXIV, *Opera omnia*, p. 1460)

The tone (9:8) represents the *essence*, the octave (2:1) the ratio between *limit* and *infinity* (*limitlessness*), the fifth (3:2) the ratio between *identity* and *difference*, and the fourth (4:3) the ratio between *rest* and *motion*. The pattern is easily understood: the strongest harmony is placed directly under the triangle's apex, the least harmonious consonance is located at the base. One also notes that the simpler the numeric ratio, the purer the consonance. With this arrangement Ficino finds an ingenious way of signaling differences without having to give preference to any of the triangle's sides. Prioritizing would anyhow make little sense, since limit, identity and rest would be inoperative without their counterparts infinity, difference and motion. Moreover, they share one and the same origin, the essence, from which they all proceed equally.

A similar strategy is pursued in Ficino's second step, where he

⁵⁵ See Ute Oehlig, *Die philosophische Begründung der Kunst bei Ficino*, Stuttgart, 1992, p. 113.

correlates the same harmonic ratios with the faculties of the soul. *Intellect* and *will* are bound together by the octave, *reason* and *imagination* by the fifth, and the (vegetative) soul's *binding* and *generative powers* by the fourth:



Not surprisingly, intellect and will as the soul's highest powers form together the most perfect consonance in Ficino's harmonic triangle—neither predominates over the other. As he points out in the *Timaeus* commentary: 'But if we spoke elsewhere of the equal ratios of things in the soul, we did not mean arithmetic parity, but harmonic equality.'⁵⁶

The specific answer of the *Timaeus* commentary to the *intellectus-voluntas* dilemma has the two powers of the mind being at the same time the components and the co-creators of a strong harmony. In this respect intellect and will can only be understood as equal elements, without, however, being identical entities. After all, the relationship of the intellect and the will is not defined by a 1:1 ratio, but by the octave's 2:1 proportion. By translating these harmonic terms back into their original epistemological content, one understands that the two cognitive faculties are equally indispensable to the acquisition of knowledge. As harmony is the expression of a

⁵⁶ Ch. XXXIV, *Opera omnia*, p. 1460: 'At si aequales in anima proportiones rerum alibi esse diximus, non arithmeticae paritatem, sed aequalitatem harmonicam intelligi volebamus.'

numeric ratio, every cognition represents the inseparable unity of intellect and will that is formed through the cognitive act.

In Ficino's last reference to the *intellectus-voluntas* dilemma, a letter to John Colet of July 1499, there seems to be a return to the intellectualistic position of the early *Philebus* commentary. This is how Sears R. Jayne (who edited the letter in question) and Michael Allen have interpreted the work.⁵⁷ Does this mean that Ficino's handling of the controversy ends on a note of discord? Not necessarily, since one needs to take into account that his letter was a response to an inquiry of the English correspondent. The letter of inquiry is unfortunately lost, but Jayne convincingly shows that Colet was interested in correlating the Pauline triad faith, hope and charity with the faculties of the intellect, will and love (if will and love coincide, as they do in Ficino's philosophy).⁵⁸ In the face of this constellation the theologically well-trained Ficino could never give equal consideration to intellect and will, let alone favor the will. That would be the same as giving hope the same status as or a higher status than faith, which would run counter to the entire tradition. In this context the will as the faculty correlated with hope—which is itself a moral virtue—ceases to represent a cognitive power. On the other hand, faith, being the central element of the Pauline triad, does indeed call for its correlative, the intellect, as the primary faculty. Yet Ficino's letter finds a way to give the will some weight, by stating that nothing can be cognized unless it is first loved. In this way the will has its own type of precedence over the intellect: before there can be actual knowledge, there is the desire to know. Ficino's letter to Colet is also valuable in the way it crafts the relationship between the two powers of the mind. It asserts that the intellect is a 'refined' will, whereas the will is a 'cruder' intellect.⁵⁹ What this means is that the two faculties mutually represent each other: 'Thus the will apprehends and the intellect wills.'⁶⁰ The interdependence of the two powers could hardly be better expressed. Not only are they co-essential, but they are also correlatives. They are conceptualized in such a way that it is impossible to think of either the intellect or the will

⁵⁷ Jayne, *John Colet*, p. 67, and Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. Allen, p. 44.

⁵⁸ Jayne, *John Colet*, pp. 60–68.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

without necessarily invoking its counterpart. Moreover, they both mirror each other's functions to the extent that one *is* the other.

5. Conclusion: Ficino's True Epistemic Drama

What caused Ficino to concern himself with the epistemic functions of intellect and will for more than thirty years, looking time after time for new ways of conceptualizing their relationship? Little is gained by saying that Ficino accepted the authority of Thomas Aquinas in one period and of Duns Scotus in another. One would still have to ask what induced him first to agree with Dominican and then with Franciscan doctrine, before finally choosing to harmonize them. One has also to realize that the issue of happiness, which was central to the medieval debate, had already lost its importance for Ficino by the time of the *Theologia Platonica*. His quest was of a different nature. The dilemma became a purely epistemological one: whether primacy should be given to the world of thought (represented by the inwardly operating intellect) over the world of objects (the concern of the outwardly rushing will), or vice versa whether objects should be given preference over the mind's innate ideas.⁶¹

A diagram listing the functions assumed by intellect and will may help to clarify their role in Ficino's thought:

Intellect	Truth universal	separation from objects	inner (enfolding) motion	seeing	<i>visual metaphors</i>
Will	Good particular	union with objects	outer (unfolding) motion	desiring	<i>love metaphors</i>

To mark the sharp difference between the two faculties Ficino even coined distinctive metaphors to describe their respective epistemic functions. The intellect is predisposed towards the Truth and grasps what is universal in objects, which is why its inward and enfolding motion separates it from things. The language used to describe its

⁶¹ Allen who focuses more on the cognition of God than on the epistemological act as such offers a different explanation by stating that 'Ficino's indecision becomes not a matter of being unable to make up his own mind, but the inevitable consequence of a fundamental circularity in his thinking which is monistic and ultimately perhaps mystical' (Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. Allen, p. 43).

epistemic performance is mostly drawn from visual experience (*claritas, perscrutare, respicere, videre, visio*). The will, on the other hand, is inclined towards the Good and conjoins itself with particular objects in its effort to understand them. The metaphors employed to explain its cognitive functioning are inspired by the language of love and desire (*amor, fruitio, gaudium, raptus, unio*). A question that arises from this comparison of intellect and will is how such divergent forces can be combined to benefit cognition.

Three options come to mind as to how to conceptualize the collaborative workings of intellect and will. One theoretical possibility is that they do not collaborate at all, either the intellect or the will being the exclusive epistemic force of the mind. This, of course, would have absurd consequences, such as sacrificing the Good for Truth or universality for particularity. Moreover, if the intellect were the sole carrier of epistemic acts, it would shape the world in its own image. The single objects in their particularity would eventually be lost to the mind. Selecting the will over the intellect would have the mind precipitate itself into the midst of things. The world in its particularity would be gained, but there would be no mind to interpret it in its entirety. A second possibility is that one faculty dominates at the expense of the other, which is the option envisaged by Ficino in his early and middle phases. Except in the *Philebus* commentary, the preferred cognitive power was the will. At times this preference is expressed very cautiously, as in the following passage of the *Theologia Platonica*:

Every mind operates rather by willing than by seeing. In seeing, it enfolds the forms inwardly, in willing, it unfolds them outwardly; in seeing, it catches sight of Truth, the trait of which is purity, in willing, it reaches the Good, the trait of which is diffusion.⁶²

The fascination with the will and the recurring passionate descriptions of its workings clearly suggests that closeness to objects is highly valued by Ficino. Despite his emphasis on the mind's ability to restore reality to greater perfection, that is, to a literally more ideal form,

⁶² Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne*, II.11 (ed. Marcel, I, p. 110 f.): 'Mens autem quae libet volendo facit opera *potius* quam videndo. Videndo enim replicat formas intus, volendo eas explicat extra, videndo respicit verum, cui propria puritas est, volendo attingit bonum cui propria est diffusio' (italics mine). For the terms *replicare* and *explicare* and their apparent similarity to Nicholas of Cusa's *complicatio-explicatio* speculation, see Albertini, *Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 84, 255.

his metaphysics does not neglect the world of experience. This brings into play the third possibility, the one Ficino developed in his later years. Even though the relationship of intellect and will remains asymmetric, the two powers of the mind are nevertheless described as parallel and complementary epistemic forces. For instance, the intellect's universality and the will's particularity are opposed to each other. In view of the cognitive act the universal and the particular are, however, needed to the same degree for anything to be cognized. The possible superiority of one faculty over the other does not add anything to the resulting cognition. The cognitive act harmonizes both intellect and will and their opposed features. One can go a step further and state that in harmonizing the intellect's *subjective* categories with the will's *objectivity*, that is, its inclination towards objects, an even more powerful mediation takes place, the mediation between mind and world.

What does the intellect ask for, except to transform itself into everything by drawing everything into itself? What does the will attempt to achieve, except to transform itself into everything by enjoying everything? The former strives that the universe should become the intellect, the latter that the will should be the universe.⁶³

The intellect makes the world 'mindlike', whereas the will ensures that the mind become 'worldlike'. Mind and world thus keep moving towards each other without ever coinciding. The brilliant metaphysician Ficino prevented this by inscribing a tension into the relationship between intellect and will, a tension that arises precisely from their complementary opposition. A subject aware of an external world will always exist, and there will always be a world of objects awaiting its interpretation.

This is the kind of philosophical achievement that reveals Ficino as indeed 'an important member and link (not always recognized) in that golden chain which is the tradition of rational metaphysics that leads from the Presocratics and Plato to Kant, Hegel and beyond'.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Opuscula theologica*, in Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne*, ed. Marcel, III, p. 333: 'Quidnam intellectus inquit, nisi cuncta in se suo modo pingendo transformare omnia in seipsum? Quid rursus voluntas annititur, nisi omnibus omnium modo fruendo seipsam in omnia transformare? Ille ergo conatur ut universum fiat quodammodo intellectus, haec autem ut voluntas sit universum.'

⁶⁴ Paul O. Kristeller, *Marsilio Ficino and his Work after Five Hundred Years*, Florence, 1987, p. 16.

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ORPHEUS REDIVIVUS: THE MUSICAL MAGIC OF MARSILIO FICINO

Angela Voss

In a letter to Paul of Middelburg, written when he was nearly sixty, Marsilio Ficino looks back over a lifetime of cultural achievements in his native city: 'This age, like a golden age, has brought back to light those liberal disciplines that were practically extinguished: grammar, poetry, oratory, painting, sculpture, architecture, music and the ancient singing of songs to the Orphic lyre.'¹ He is referring to both his own and his friends' well-attested skill at improvising or composing musical settings for the hymns of Orpheus, which he himself had translated from the Greek, but which he had not published for fear that his readers would suspect him of reinstating the cults of ancient gods and daemons.² Despite Ficino's initial caution, however, we have ample evidence that their use, primarily as part of a ritual activity in the practice of natural magic, lay at the very heart of his work.³ 'Nothing', suggests Ficino's friend Pico della Mirandola, 'is

¹ M. Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basle, 1576, repr. Turin, 1959 etc., p. 944: 'Hoc enim seculum tanquam aureum, liberales disciplinas ferme iam extinctas reduxit in lucem, grammaticam, poesim, oratoriam, picturam, sculpturam, architecturam, musicam, antiquum ad Orphicam lyram carminum cantum.'

² Ficino, *Opera*, p. 933. Ficino translated the hymns in 1462 but his translation does not survive. Excerpts may be found in other works, primarily the *Theologia Platonica* (*Théologie platonicienne de l'immortalité des âmes*, ed. by R. Marcel, 3 vols, Paris, 1964–70). The hymns probably date from the early centuries AD; the first MS was brought to Italy from Constantinople in 1424. See Ilana Klutstein, *Marsilio Ficino et la théologie ancienne: Oracles chaldaïques, Hymnes orphiques, Hymnes de Proclus*, Florence, 1987; Thomas Taylor, *The Mystical Hymns of Orpheus*, London, 1896; D. P. Walker, 'Orpheus the Theologian and Renaissance Platonists', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 16 (1953), pp. 100–20; Martin West, *The Orphic Poems*, Oxford, 1983, pp. 26–29.

³ Giovanni Corsi wrote in his biography '[Ficino] expounded the hymns of Orpheus and it is said that he sang them to the lyre in the ancient style with remarkable sweetness'; see 'The Life of Marsilio Ficino', in *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, 6 vols to date, London, 1975–, III, p. 138. Other references to Orpheus or the lyre include *Letters*, I, pp. 32, 141–44, 198; II, pp. 14, 33; IV, pp. 16–17; V, pp. 37–38; Ficino, *Opera omnia*, pp. 608–09, 822–23, 871, 934–35; Lorenzo de' Medici, *Opere*, ed. by A. Simioni, 2 vols, Bari, 1914, II, p. 41; P. O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2 vols, Florence, 1937, II, pp. 87–88, 225.

more effective in natural magic than the hymns of Orpheus, if the right kind of music, intention of the mind, and other circumstances are applied which are only known to the wise.⁴

Many of Ficino's friends recognized a particular quality in his music-making, a gift that led them to name him Orpheus, the mythical musician who was said to charm men, animals and even stones with his lyre-playing. The poet Naldo Naldi suggested that in Ficino the very soul of Orpheus had been reincarnated: 'Hence he soothes the unyielding oaks with his lyre and his song and softens once more the hearts of wild beasts.'⁵ However, it is in the words of his friend Poliziano that we begin to glimpse a greater significance in Ficino's association with Orpheus. The poet was accustomed to hear Marsilio discourse on the secrets of the heavens, on healing, on metaphysics; 'Often', he says, 'his wise lyre chases out these grave thoughts and his voice follows the song springing up from under his expressive fingers, like Orpheus, interpreter of Apollo's songs . . . Then when he has finished, drawn on by the Muses' *furore* I return home, return to the composition of verses, and inspired, I invoke Phoebus, touching the divine lyre with my plectrum.'⁶ Elsewhere the poet concludes with an etymological pun that '[Marsilio's lyre], far more successful than the lyre of Thracian Orpheus, has brought back from the underworld what is, if I am not mistaken, the true Eurydice, that is, Platonic wisdom with its all-embracing understanding.'⁷

⁴ 'Nihil efficientius hymnis Orphei in naturali magia, si debita musica, animi intentio, et ceterae circumstantiae, quas norunt sapientes, fuerint adhibitae', G. Pico della Mirandola, 'Conclusiones numero XXXI secundum propriam opinionem de modo intelligendi hymnos Orphei secundum magiam . . .', no. 2, in his *Conclusiones nongentae: le novecento tesi dell'anno 1486*, ed. by Albano Biondi, Florence, 1995, p. 120.

⁵ 'Hinc rigidas cythara quercus et carmine mulcet | Atque feris iterum mollia corda facit', Naldo Naldi, 'Carmen ad Ficinum', in Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, II, p. 262; tr. by John Warden in his 'Orpheus and Ficino', in *Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth*, ed. by J. Warden, Toronto, 1982, pp. 85–110, at p. 86.

⁶ 'saepe graves pellit docta testudine curas, | Et vocem argutus suggerit articulis, | Qualis Apollinei modulator carminis Orpheus | . . . Hinc, ubi conticuit, Musarum concitus oestro | Deferer ad solitos protinus ipse Lares | Atque iterum meditator numeros Phoebumque laccessio | Attonitusque sacram pectine plango chelym', Angelo Poliziano, poem to Bartolomeo Fonzio in B. Fontius, *Carmina*, ed. by L. Juhász, Leipzig, 1932, pp. 24–28 (p. 27), repr. in A. Poliziano, *Opera omnia*, ed. by Ida Maier, 3 vols, Turin, 1970–71, III, pp. 169–73 (p. 172). See also Ida Maier, *Ange Politien. La formation d'un poète humaniste (1469–1480)*, Geneva, 1966, pp. 30, n. 51, 35–36 and 78–82 (p. 81 for this passage in French translation); Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, II, pp. 277–83.

⁷ Poliziano, *Opera omnia*, I, p. 310: 'Longe felicior quam Thraciensis Orphei cithara veram (ni fallor) Eurydicen hoc est amplissimi iudicii Platoniam sapientiam revo-

In early versions of the myth, Orpheus led Eurydice up out of the underworld and united with her. 'I walked the dark road of Hades trusting my cithara', says the Orpheus of the *Argonautica*, 'for love of my wife'.⁸ But by the time of Virgil's classic account, Eurydice has been lost.⁹ Orpheus fails to obey the injunction of Pluto not to look back, and she returns to the shadows. But not for ever, for she can be rescued and brought back to enlighten a world arid with sterile theological debate and 'abominable ignorance' of the divine, as Ficino puts it.¹⁰ And so, like Orpheus, Ficino rescues her—but not from Hades. His is a new Eurydice, a Eurydice who shines with the clear light of divine knowledge, who brings Goodness, Truth and Beauty to draw the minds of men away from their secular concerns. 'I have not, in company with Claudian, impiously sung of . . . Proserpine, snatched, as the story goes, into the underworld', exclaims Ficino, 'but, as is the way of the Platonists, I have depicted the sublime upward soaring of the heavenly mind'.¹¹ His Eurydice, Philosophy, has not sojourned in the realm of darkness: 'a treasure more precious than all others, no offspring of the bowels of earth and Hades but descending from Jove's head and the very top of heaven!'¹²

For Ficino, Orpheus was a venerable ancient theologian who learned the secrets of immortality from the Egyptian sage Hermes Trismegistus and passed them on to Pythagoras, and so to Plato and his Neoplatonic interpreters.¹³ Most importantly, Orpheus played a

cavit ab inferis.' See M. J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Florence, 1998, pp. 120–23 on Orpheus, Eurydice, and the pun.

⁸ Quoted in West, *The Orphic Poems*, pp. 37–38. The Orphic *Argonautica* is an epic poem of about the fourth century AD in which 'Orpheus' narrates the story of his participation in Jason's Argonaut expedition.

⁹ Virgil, *Georgics*, IV.494–98. For an examination of the Latin poets' handling of Orpheus, see W. S. Anderson, 'The Orpheus of Virgil and Ovid: *febile nescio quid*', in *Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth*, pp. 25–50. Anderson suggests that the story of Orpheus's failure to rescue Eurydice may have originated as early as the fifth century BC, but that is a point of contention.

¹⁰ 'Religionem sanctam pro viribus ab execrabili inscitia redimamus', Ficino, *De Christiana religione*, in *Opera omnia*, p. 1; see J. Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols, Leiden etc., 1991, p. 289.

¹¹ 'Neque charam, ut aiunt, sororem tuam una cum Claudiano Proserpinam raptam ad inferos impie cecini . . . sed ut veri Platonici solent beatissimum depinxi coelestis mentis ascensum', *Opera omnia*; p. 756; *Letters*, III, p. 15.

¹² 'O thesaurum omnium pretiosissimum, haudquaquam terrae Plutonisque visceribus editum, sed summo coeli vertice Iovisque capite descendentem', *Opera omnia*, p. 758; *Letters*, III, p. 21.

¹³ The idea that profound truth, understood by the ancient Egyptian sages, was transmitted through a succession of interpreters to the Christian era was central to

central role in the transmission of a perennial wisdom which Ficino understood to be fully unfolded in the Christian revelation—a philosophical confirmation of religious truth necessary for the salvation of mankind; and in Orpheus, indeed, he found a model for his own aspiration to lead his fellow man towards a more enlightened state of being. The Orpheus of the hymns and of the Orphic epic *Argonautica* was revered by Ficino precisely for giving voice to the divine truth of theology through a poetic mythology and the singing of hymns. In this Orpheus provided the key to Ficino's Christian Platonism. In naming Jupiter as the supreme creative principle, the 'beginning, middle and end of the universe', Orpheus demonstrated his understanding of one of the fundamental assertions of the ancient theology, that the whole of creation is constantly being regenerated in a never-ending movement towards unity: 'all things first flow from that eternal source when they are born; then they flow back again to it, when they seek their own origin; and finally, they are perfected, after they have returned to their source.'¹⁴

As poet, priest, prophet and lover, Orpheus embodied the four conditions on which knowledge of God depended, the four frenzies or madneses in which the human soul was lifted beyond its earthly condition and achieved spiritual possession.¹⁵ In Ficino's understanding,

Ficino's understanding of his own destiny: to interpret and communicate this truth in a manner appropriate for his own age. In the preface to his translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (*Opera omnia*, p. 1836), Ficino gives the genealogy of sages as Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras, Philolaus and Plato (see Brian Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek 'Corpus Hermeticum' and the Latin 'Asclepius'*, Cambridge, 1992, p. xlviii), but in his *Theologia Platonica*, XVIII.1 (*Opera omnia*, p. 386; ed. Marcel, III, p. 148), Ficino extended the list backwards to place Zoroaster at the head and forwards to the schools of Plotinus and Proclus. See Allen, *Synoptic Art*, ch. 1.

¹⁴ 'Singula quoque imprimis ab illo perenni fonte effluunt, dum nascuntur, deinde in eundem refluunt, dum suam illam originem repetunt, postremo perficiuntur, postquam in suum principium redierunt. Hoc vaticinatus Orpheus; Iovem principium mediumque et finem universi vocavit', Ficino, *De amore*, II.1 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1323); in English in Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, tr. by Sears Jayne, 2nd edn, Dallas, Tex., 1985, p. 45.

¹⁵ Ficino, *De amore* VII.14 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1361); in English in *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, tr. Jayne, p. 171. Platonic sources for divine frenzy: *Ion*, 533D; *Phaedrus*, 244, 265A-B, 249D. See M. J. B. Allen, *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer*, Berkeley etc., 1981, pp. 82-86, 220-25; idem, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of his 'Phaedrus' Commentary, its Sources and Genesis*, Berkeley etc., 1984, ch. 2; idem, 'The Soul as Rhapsode: Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's *Ion*', in *Humanity and Divinity in Renaissance and Reformation: Essays in Honor of Charles Trinkaus*, ed. by J. W. O'Malley et al. Leiden etc., 1993, pp. 125-48, repr. in his *Plato's Third Eye*:

the frenzy of the poet or musician was the beginning of the initiatory process, the awakening of that dormant memory of divinity which came to fruition in the final rapture of love.¹⁶ But 'any madness', says Ficino, 'whether the prophetic, hieratic or amatory, justly seems to be released as poetic madness when it proceeds to songs and poems.'¹⁷ What do we see in Orpheus's madneses other than a transformation of Bacchic frenzy? The maenads of Dionysus have become the Muses of Apollo, the initiation takes place not through the intoxication of the senses but through the fire of the imagination. For Orpheus, and for Ficino, the function of the priest in leading people to recognize their own divinity was precisely the function of the musician, for music, in imitating or reproducing the laws of the cosmos in sound, may reveal the true nature of the soul to itself: namely, that it partakes of the soul of the world. That is, as Ficino interprets Plotinus, all created things contain within themselves a spark of divinity, sown by the power of the world soul, which itself embraces the eternal realm of Ideas.¹⁸ It is in the Pythagorean creation myth of Plato's *Timaeus* that we are given an account of this process, for the creator fashions human souls from the same substance as the universal soul, with its inherent harmonic structure. But due to the necessity of embodiment, the soul becomes twisted, distorted, stirred up, and needs to be reminded, through audible and visible images, of its pristine perfection.¹⁹ The Platonist would appeal to the harmonies of the incorruptible heavens as a model when composing his earthly music, using the resonances of the 'perfect' Pythagorean intervals as its essence.²⁰ Through sympathetic vibration—like strings on a cithara, says Ficino—the human soul would

Studies in Marsilio Ficino's Metaphysics and its Sources, Aldershot, 1995; G. Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic: Towards a Historiography of Others*, Chicago, 1993, pp. 172–83.

¹⁶ See Ficino, 'On divine frenzy' in *Letters*, I, pp. 42–48.

¹⁷ 'Quamobrem furor quilibet, sive fatidicus sive mysterialis seu amatorius, dum in cantus procedit et carmina, merito in furorem poeticum videtur absolvi', Ficino, Commentary on *Phaedrus*, IV.3, in Allen, *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer*, pp. 84–85.

¹⁸ *De vita*, III.1, in Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed. and tr. by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark, Binghamton, NY, 1989, pp. 242–47.

¹⁹ Plato, *Timaeus*, 41D–44A. Ficino's commentary is on pp. 1438–84 of the *Opera omnia*.

²⁰ As described in *Timaeus*, 35A–37C. See M. J. B. Allen, *Nuptial Arithmetic: Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on the Fatal Number in Book VIII of Plato's 'Republic'*, Berkeley etc., 1994, chs 1 and 2.

then be restored to its natural congruence with the cosmos.²¹ So Ficino's music was not for the ears of the rulers of Hades, it was for the divinities of the celestial sphere, and in particular those divinities addressed by Orpheus in his hymns.

In the Orphic hymns Ficino found perfect vehicles for what he termed natural magic, a process of bringing the human soul into alignment with the harmonies of the heavens, and ultimately, with God Himself, although he could hardly make this explicit.²² Composed in the Hellenistic era and attributed to Orpheus, the hymns praise the powers in the cosmos, with instructions for burning appropriate incense, in a sequence of addresses to individual deities.²³ Very early in his career, Ficino had discovered a magic in singing Orphic hymns: shortly after singing a hymn to the Cosmos, Cosmus himself, alias Cosimo de' Medici, had granted him patronage and a villa in which to work.²⁴ A delightful pun, but it seemed that something more serious was brought about when the hymns were performed in a particular context, when the internal emotion and external ritual were perfectly aligned. 'Our spirit', Ficino says, 'is in conformity with the rays of the heavenly spirit, which penetrates everything either secretly or obviously. It shows a far greater kinship when we have a vehement

²¹ 'adeo ut cum eorum more opportune canendo et sonando clamaveris, responsuri protinus videantur vel instar echo, vel sicut corda quaedam in cithara tremens, quotiens vibratur altera temperata similiter', Ficino, *De vita*, III.21, ed. Kaske and Clark, pp. 360–61.

²² In the Apology of *De vita*, Ficino describes natural magic as that which 'by natural things, seeks to obtain the services of the celestials for the prosperous health of our bodies . . . [it is] practiced by those who seasonably subject natural materials to natural causes to be formed in a wondrous way' ('quae rebus naturalibus ad prosperam corporum valetudinem coelestium beneficia captat . . . qui naturales materias opportune causis subiciunt naturalibus mira quadam ratione formandas'), ed. Kaske and Clark, pp. 396–99. However in the final chapter of the *De vita* Ficino hints that 'sometimes it can happen that when you bring seminal reasons to bear on forms, higher gifts too may descend, since reasons in the Anima Mundi are conjoined to the intellectual forms in her and through these to the Ideas of the Divine Mind' ('Fieri vero posse quandoque, ut rationibus ad formas sic adhibitibus sublimiora quoque dona descendant, quatenus rationes in anima mundi coniunctae sunt intellectualibus eiusdem animae formis, atque per illas divinae mentis ideis'), *De vita*, III.26, ed. Kaske and Clark, pp. 390–91.

²³ See n. 2, above; also M. J. B. Allen, 'Summoning Plotinus: Ficino, Smoke, and the Strangled Chickens', in *Plato's Third Eye*, art. XIV, on fumigations and the Orphic hymns. With Mark Rylance, Catherine King, Mark Tucker and the Marini Consort, I have made a recording of Orphic music based on Orphic hymns and Ficino's words: 'The Secrets of the Heavens', RVRCD53, Riverrun Records, Potton, Cambs, 2000.

²⁴ See Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, II, pp. 87–88.

desire for that life and are seeking a benefit that is consistent with it, and thus transfer our own spirit into its rays by means of love, particularly if we make use of song and light and the perfume appropriate to the deity, like the hymns that Orpheus consecrated to the cosmic deities.²⁵ And why are the hymns so powerful? Because, Pico says, in them Orpheus 'interwove the mysteries of his doctrines with the texture of fables, covering them with a poetic veil', so that to the uninitiated they would appear to be the 'sheerest tales and trifles'.²⁶

What did Orpheus know about music and poetry, what was the secret preserved in his hymns? For Ficino and Pico, to perform the hymns was to move from everyday consciousness to a spiritual perception of reality. You will not understand the essence of the hymns, insists Pico, unless you know how to comprehend sensible properties by way of secret analogy.²⁷ Plotinus tells us to 'shut your eyes, and change to and wake another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use'.²⁸ Iamblichus assures us that conceptual thought or theoretical philosophizing will not lead to knowledge of the gods; rather, 'the perfect efficacy of ineffable works, which are divinely performed in a way surpassing all intelligence, and the power of inexplicable symbols, which are known only to the Gods, impart theurgic union'.²⁹ As Ficino describes it in his letter on divine frenzy: 'the soul receives the sweetest harmonies and numbers through the ears, and by these

²⁵ 'similiter spiritus noster radiis illius tam occultis, quam manifestis omnia penetrantibus. Evadit etiam longe cognatior, quando erga vitam illam vehementer afficimur consentaneum illi beneficium exoptantes, atque ita spiritum nostrum in illius radios transferentes amore praesertim si cantum et lumen adhibemus, odoremque numini consentaneum, quales Orpheus hymnos mundanis numinibus consecravit', Ficino, Commentary on Plotinus, *Opera omnia*, p. 1747; tr. by Warden, 'Orpheus and Ficino', p. 95.

²⁶ 'ita Orpheus suorum dogmatum mysteria fabularum intexit involucris et poetico velamento dissimulavit, ut si quis legat illius hymnos, nihil subesse credat praeter fabellas nugaeque meracissimas', G. Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate*, ed. by E. Garin, Florence, 1942, p. 162; quoted in E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, Oxford, 1980, p. 18.

²⁷ 'Qui nescierit perfecte sensibiles proprietates per viam secretae analogiae intellectualizare, nichil ex hymnis Orphei sanum intelliget', G. Pico della Mirandola, Orphic Conclusion no. 7, *Conclusiones nongentae*, p. 122.

²⁸ Plotinus, *Ennead*, I.6.8., tr. by A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinus*, 7 vols, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1966-88, I, p. 259.

²⁹ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, II.11.96, tr. by Thomas Taylor, *Iamblichus on the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans and Assyrians*, 2nd edn, London, 1895; repr. Frome, Somerset, 1999, p. 62. For a thorough study of Iamblichan theurgy, see G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, University Park, Pa., 1995.

echoes is reminded and aroused to the divine music which may be heard by the more penetrating sense of mind.³⁰ On hearing earthly music, the soul is reminded of the music of God and the heavens that it once enjoyed, and 'burns with desire' to return to its divine source.³¹ The inspired musician, thus enraptured, conveys the 'inner reason' (*intima ratio*) of divine harmony to the listener, who is moved in sympathetic resonance with the performer.³² So when Ficino sang hymns to the cosmic deities, there was no question of intentionally invoking a spirit or god. The object was rather to tune oneself, like a string on a lyre, until one's spirit resonated in unison with the desired archetypal principle.³³ In playing music which specifically corresponded in quality to Venus, Jupiter or the Sun—and Ficino describes such qualities in his *Book of Life*³⁴—the magician was thus transforming himself into the perfect medium for a divine presence, and he perceived that presence through an immediate intuitive sense, a sense innate to the soul like a light infused by God.³⁵ Likewise on a more lofty plane, it would follow that the more profoundly one's contemplation of God allowed one's soul to recognize its *own* divinity, the more profoundly one might come to know God. 'I often resort to the solemn sound of the lyre and to singing', Ficino tells us, 'to raise the mind to the highest considerations and to God as much as I may.'³⁶

³⁰ 'per aures vero concentus quosdam numerosque suavissimos animus haurit, hisque imaginibus admonetur, atque excitatur ad divinam musicam, acriori quodam mentis et intimo sensu considerandam', *Opera omnia*, p. 614; *Letters*, I, p. 45.

³¹ 'totusque desiderio fervet, cupitque ut vera musica rursus fruatur', *ibid.*

³² 'graviori quodam firmiorique iudicio divinam ac coelestem harmoniam imitantes, intimae rationis sensum notionesque inversum, pedes ac numeros digerunt', *ibid.*

³³ We have one eye-witness account of Ficino himself in performance, by Bishop Campano: 'If curly-haired Apollo should play upon Marsilio's cithara, Apollo would fall defeated in both dexterity of hand and singing. There is frenzy; when he sings, as a lover to the singing of his beloved, he plucks his lyre in harmony with the melody and rhythm of the song. Then his eyes burn, he leaps to his feet, and he discovers music which he never learnt by rote.' ('Marsilii citharam crispus si tentet Apollo | Et dextra et cantu victus Apollo cadet | Et furor est, cum cantat amans cantante puella | Ad flexum, ad nutum percutit ille lyram | Tunc ardent oculi, tunc planta exurgit utraque | Et quos non didicit, comperit ille modos.') Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, II, p. 230; quoted in A. Della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia platonica di Firenze*, Florence, 1902; repr. Turin, 1968, p. 791.

³⁴ Ficino, *De vita*, III.21, ed. Kaske and Clark, pp. 360–61.

³⁵ On Ficino's distinction between 'natural' and 'infused' light of knowledge, see *De amore*, IV.4–5; in English in Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, tr. Jayne, pp. 75–79.

³⁶ 'gravioribus fidibus cantibusque frequenter incumbo, ut caetera sensuum oblec-

At the shrines of Apollo, a healing took place. In a state of trance it is said that the initiate heard the music of the spheres and was made whole.³⁷ 'It is hardly surprising', says Ficino, 'that both music and medicine are often practised by the same men', since they are united in the power of the one god.³⁸ Ficino found his own vocation as a healer confirmed in the words of Orpheus. 'Orpheus, in his book of hymns', he tells us, 'asserts that Apollo, by his vital rays, bestows health and life on all and drives away disease. By the sounding strings, that is, by their vibrations and power, he regulates everything; by the lowest string, winter; by the highest string, summer; and by the middle strings, he brings in spring and autumn.'³⁹ Apollo's lyre thus becomes a model for the harmony of the whole cosmos, uniting the physical order with the spiritual, the body with the soul. In revealing to the listener or player the harmonic proportions in his own soul, through number and pitch, the lyre is both a visual and audible image of a secret order to be found beyond the level of sense-perception, an articulation of the hidden relationships between different levels of reality. In a fragment from a scholiast on Virgil we find the following provocative statement: 'some say that Orpheus's lyre had seven strings corresponding to the seven circles of heaven. Varro says there was an Orphic book about summoning the soul, called the Lyre. It is said that the souls need the cithara in order to ascend.'⁴⁰ For Ficino the musical magic of Orpheus was concerned with nothing less than the redemption of the soul, and the key to its effective operation was the desire and intention of Love.

tamenta penitus negligam, molestias animae, corporisque expellam, mentem ad sublimia Deumque pro viribus erigam', *Opera omnia*, p. 651; *Letters*, I, p. 143.

³⁷ For speculation on the nature of initiation rituals in Presocratic times, I rely on P. Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom*, Shaftesbury, Dorset, and Inverness, Calif., 1999, pp. 129–30. See also idem, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition*, Oxford, 1995, pp. 284–88.

³⁸ 'Quum ergo idem sit Musicae dux, medicinaeque repertor, quid mirum utramque artem saepe ab iisdem hominibus exerceri', *Opera omnia*, p. 652; *Letters*, I, p. 142.

³⁹ 'Hunc in libro hymnorum Orpheus vitalibus radiis sanitatem vitamque largiri cunctis arbitratur morbosque propellere. Praeterea fidibus canoris, id est, motibus viribusque suis omnia temperare, hypate, id est, gravi voce, hiemem. Neate, id est, acuta aestatem. Dorionibus, id est, vocibus mediis, ver autumnumque producere', *ibid.*

⁴⁰ 'Dicunt tamen quidam liram Orphei cum vii cordis fuisse, et celum habet vii zonas, unde teologia assignatur. Varro autem dicit librum Orfei de vocanda anima Liram nominari, et negantur animae sine cithara posse ascendere.' See West, *The Orphic Poems*, pp. 29–30.

In the preface to his commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, Ficino tells his beloved Giovanni Cavalcanti: 'A long time ago, dear Giovanni, I learned from Orpheus that love existed, and that it held the keys to the whole world . . .'⁴¹ It was the key of Love that unlocked, for Ficino, the gates to unity; a unity of perception in which there could be no opposition of philosophy and religion, knowledge and piety, or, more particularly, Platonic thought and Christian faith. In this mode of apprehension, which preceded any 'intellectual energizing', as Iamblichus puts it, mind and soul were one, and knowledge was gained through an all-embracing intuitive insight into the nature of reality.⁴² In this way Ficino saw Orpheus in his hymns addressing the gods as multi-faceted, multi-layered cosmic principles, each one mirroring the diversity of creation yet representing aspects of a single unified power, all the gods in each god and each in all. Or as Pico put it, 'He who understands profoundly and deeply how the unity of Venus is unfolded in the trinity of the Graces, the unity of Destiny in the trinity of the Fates, and the unity of Saturn in the trinity of Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto, knows the proper way of proceeding in Orphic theology.'⁴³ Thus 'to proceed Orphically' meant adopting a poetic vision, a vision rich in mythology, symbol, allegory, metaphor. Indeed, Michael Allen has pointed out that 'to proceed Orphically was the *only* way of accommodating polytheistic structures to the deep grammar of monotheism.'⁴⁴ And the only way to 'proceed Orphically' was to transcend logical thinking and abandon oneself to *Eros*, to the god who is the desire to reconnect with one's source, and who leads the mind to abandon its habitual discursive thought. Love is a magician, says Ficino, 'because the whole power of magic consists in love. The work of magic is the attraction

⁴¹ 'Iamdiu, suavissime mi Ioannes, esse amorem ac mundi totius habere claves ab Orpheo . . . didiceram', quoted in R. Marcel, *Marsilio Ficino*, Paris, 1958, p. 341, n. 1; in English in Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, tr. Jayne, p. 179.

⁴² See Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, II.11.97, tr. Taylor, p. 62; Ficino dwells at some length on this intuitive mode of knowing in his translation of Iamblichus's *De mysteriis*, *Opera omnia*, p. 1874; see A. Voss, 'On the Knowledge of Divine Things', *Sphinx. Journal of the London Convivium for Archetypal Studies*, 6 (1994), pp. 149–72.

⁴³ 'Qui profunde et intellectualiter divisionem unitatis Veneris in trinitatem Gratiarum, et unitatis fatalis, in trinitatem Parcarum, et unitatis Saturni in trinitatem Iovis, Neptuni et Plutonis intellexerit, videbit modum debite procedendi in Orphica theologia', G. Pico della Mirandola, Orphic conclusion no. 8, *Conclusiones nongentae*, p. 122.

⁴⁴ Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino*, p. 115.

of one thing by another by way of a certain affinity of nature.⁴⁵

Ficino's Orphic insight was to reach its metaphysical culmination in his anagogical meditations on the Sun and Light,⁴⁶ short treatises which draw the reader from *episteme* to *gnosis*, to the realization that the source of knowledge and the knower are one and the same. In his letter *The Orphic comparison of the sun to God*, Ficino explains, 'It is certainly in the Sun that visible light is created from the intelligible light, and there also sight is created from understanding. For there understanding is no different from the same intelligible light nor sight from visible light itself.'⁴⁷ Using the analogy of many colours emanating from the source of pure light, Ficino elaborates on what he calls the Orphic mystery: colours unite sense-perception with their ultimate essence through the mediating function of sight's influence [*affectus*] and will [*voluntas*]. 'They are in no way differentiated through the absolute essence', says Ficino, 'for there all colours are a single, pure light; but they are distinguished through the power of seeing and through the will, for the light sees and wills the one light diffused in many ways through many objects.'⁴⁸ So also the gods play and dance in an eternal outflow of divine energy, and just as colours are perceived through the sight of the eyes, they are glimpsed through the desire of the soul. The supreme Orphic insight—that the many are in the one—can be most powerfully demonstrated by the unity of the literal, symbolic and anagogic levels of perception in relation to the one Sun.

This is the basis of Ficino's understanding of astrology, which plays an integral part in his Orphic singing. For him, the stars and planets are not seen by the objective mind as causal agents, but through a different kind of knowing as symbols. In performing an invocation

⁴⁵ 'quia tota vis magicae in amore consistit. Magicae opus est, attractio rei unius ab alia, ex quadam cognatione naturae', Ficino, *De amore*, VI.10 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1348); in English in Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, tr. Jayne, p. 127.

⁴⁶ Ficino, *Liber de sole*, in *Opera omnia*, pp. 965–75, tr. G. Cornelius, D. Costello, G. Tobjyn, A. Voss and V. Wells in *Sphinx*, 6 (1994), pp. 123–48; *Liber de lumine* in *Opera omnia*, pp. 976–86. The two books were published together in 1493 (*Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*, 9880).

⁴⁷ 'Illic utique ex intelligibili luce fit visibilis. Et intellectu quoque fit visus. Nihil enim ibi aliud intellectus est quam lux intelligibilis eadem. Nihil aliud visus quam lux ipsa visibilis', *Opera omnia*, p. 825; *Letters*, V, p. 44.

⁴⁸ 'Per absolutam essentiam minime dividuntur, una enim lux pura ibi sunt cuncti colores. Per visionem voluntatemque invicem distinguuntur. Quoniam et videt et vult multis lucem unam modis permulta subiecta diffundi', *Opera omnia*, p. 826; *Letters*, V, p. 46.

to Venus, for example, at 'a suitable astrological hour',⁴⁹ when she herself is visible in the heavens, or joining the Sun or Jupiter, the singer is consciously uniting the inner and outer dimensions of experience. Moreover, if the singer himself is full of intent, emotion, and longing, he is making himself receptive to the influence he desires. 'If anyone . . . wears an image which has been properly fashioned, or certainly if anyone uses a rightly made medicine, and yearns vehemently to get help from it and believes with all his heart and hopes with all his strength', says Ficino in his *Book of Life*, 'he will surely get a great deal more help from it.'⁵⁰ 'The Arabs say', he continues, 'that when we fashion images rightly our spirit, if it has been intent upon the work and upon the stars through imagination and emotion, is joined together with the very spirit of the world and with the rays of the stars'⁵¹ (which would equally apply to music-making) and moreover, 'they hold that certain words pronounced with a strong emotion have great force to aim the effect of images precisely where the emotions and words are directed.'⁵² There can be little doubt that Ficino too believed this, and he gives specific rules for composing songs according to the 'rule of the stars' (*stellarum norma*).⁵³ A song that corresponds to the heavens, both in its imitation of planetary configurations and through the 'disposition of the imagination' of the singer, will powerfully affect both performer and listener.⁵⁴ Ficino concedes that it is very difficult to know what kinds of tones

⁴⁹ 'ex electa temporis opportunitate', Ficino, *De vita*, III.21, ed. Kaske and Clark, pp. 358–59.

⁵⁰ 'ut si quis imaginem . . . gestans rite factam, vel certe medicina similiter utens, opem ab ea vehementer affectet, et proculdubio credat speretque firmissime, hinc certe quam plurimum sit adiumento cumulus accessurus', *ibid.*, III.20, ed. Kaske and Clark, pp. 352–53.

⁵¹ 'Tradunt Arabes spiritum nostrum quando rite fabricamus imagines, si per imaginationem et affectum ad opus attentissimus fuerit et ad stellas, coniungi cum ipso mundi spiritu atque cum stellarum radiis', *ibid.*

⁵² 'Verba praeterea quaedam acriore quodam affectu pronuntiata vim circa imagines magnam habere censent ad effectum earum illuc proprie dirigendum, quorum affectus intenduntur et verba', *ibid.*, III.21, ed. Kaske and Clark, pp. 354–55.

⁵³ 'sic ex tonis primo quidem ad stellarum normam electis, deinde ad earundem congruitatem inter se compositis, communem quasi formam fieri, atque in ea coelestem aliquam suboriri virtutem', *ibid.*, ed. Kaske and Clark, pp. 356–57.

⁵⁴ 'Concentus igitur spiritu sensuque plenus, si forte tum secundum eius significata, tum secundum eius articulos atque formam ex articulis resultantem, tum etiam secundum imaginationis affectum huic sideri respondeat aut illi, non minorem inde virtutem quam quaelibet alia compositio traicit in cantantem, atque ex hoc in proximum auditorem', *ibid.*, ed. Kaske and Clark, pp. 358–59.

are suitable for what sorts of stars, but he supposes that such knowledge comes about through a combination of our own efforts and 'divine chance'.⁵⁵ When the ritual is perfected, the god appears.

The intent behind Ficino's Orphic singing is clear: the stars are not being worshipped; they do not choose to act in any way; deities are not being invoked. Rather, the singer is refining and perfecting his own spirit so that it may reach a condition in which it naturally receives the gifts of the heavens, freely offered, and he does this through imitating them. The theurgic implications of raising one's spirit beyond the celestial realm to the condition of divinity—of becoming God—are not dwelt on by Ficino in the *Book of Life*; he had enough trouble justifying his natural magic to the papal authorities.⁵⁶ But he does suggest that, in the same way as song, the power of prayer derives not from the human act alone of worshipping a divinity or a star, but from the wholly natural power that speech, song and words have in themselves to connect with the spiritual realm. The Pythagoreans, says Ficino, 'used to perform certain wonders by words, songs, and sounds in the Apollonian and Orphic manner';⁵⁷ it seems that they knew how music healed, and they knew that the more clearly the laws governing the cosmos could be reproduced in sound, the more effective the healing. As I suggested earlier, this would have involved the reproduction of the intervals of the Pythagorean scale, with its perfect octave, fourth and fifth, which were understood to govern the very fabric of the cosmos; but also, perhaps, the sounding of the overtones, or harmonics, which arose from these intervals. It is evident that this 'occult' dimension of sound was known to the Greeks through the laws of mathematics.⁵⁸ In manifesting these laws, they brought to the ears a hidden or secret

⁵⁵ 'sed partim diligentia nostra, partim divina quadam sorte non aliter id assequi possumus', *ibid.*, ed. Kaske and Clark, pp. 356–57.

⁵⁶ Ficino anticipated trouble from the Church authorities and included an *Apologia* at the end of *De vita*. He was nevertheless accused of an offence against religion before the Roman Curia and was only saved from the 'voracious jaws of the wolves' by his friend Bishop Orsini of Florence, who intervened with the Pope on his behalf. See Ficino, *De vita*, ed. Kaske and Clark, pp. 5–7, 395–401.

⁵⁷ 'Item Pythagorici verbis et cantibus atque sonis mirabilia quaedam Phoebi et Orphei more facere consueti', *De vita*, III.21, ed. Kaske and Clark, pp. 354–55.

⁵⁸ See J. Godwin, *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth*, London, 1987, pp. 184–93, for a comprehensive explanation of the symbolism of the harmonic series. Godwin refers to Iamblichus's commentary on the *Arithmetic* of Nicomachus as a source for the Greek familiarity with both the overtone and undertone series (p. 190).

dimension of reality which spoke with a divine, not a human voice. Indeed Ficino talks of the very nature of song as akin to the heavens, 'For this too is air, hot or warm, still breathing and somehow living . . .'⁵⁹ The healing effect of music on our souls, he continues, is due to this spiritual property, which arises from a combination of three things: its vital power, the choice of a suitable astrological hour, and the intention of the singer himself, whose 'vital and animal power, when it is most efficacious, not only acts powerfully on its own body when its spirit undergoes a very intense conception and agitation through song but soon also moves a neighbouring body by emanation'.⁶⁰ So healing occurs through the action of the music-spirit, as it connects with the human spirit, which is itself the mediator between body and soul. 'You will allow that there is a wondrous power in an aroused and singing spirit, if you allow to the Pythagoreans and Platonists that the heavens are a spirit and that they order all things through their motions and tones.'⁶¹ For Ficino, all musical theory and technique must be in the service of this end, for it is only through a knowledge of *harmonia* that the musician can understand the equivalence of musical tone and interval to the ratios inherent in the hidden structure of the cosmos. Ficino lays out the rules of consonance in a letter to his fellow musician, Domenico Benivieni, on the principles of music.⁶² In his letter, Ficino not only describes the particular qualities of the consonances and dissonances that make up a musical scale, but finds the same qualities in the interrelationships of the zodiacal signs, thus applying the Pythagorean notion of harmonious ratios governing the movements and distances of the planets to the divisions of the tropical zodiac used in traditional astrology. For instance, Ficino begins 'just as with notes we find the second dissonant from the first, so here we find that the second sign

⁵⁹ 'Est enim aer et hic quidem calens sive tepens, spirans adhuc et quodammodo vivens', Ficino, *De vita*, III.21, ed. Kaske and Clark, pp. 358–59.

⁶⁰ 'sic vitalis animalisque virtus ubi efficacissima fuerit, ibi intentissima quadam sui spiritus per cantum tum conceptione agitationeque in corpus proprium potentem agit, tum effusione movet subinde propinquum', *ibid.*

⁶¹ 'Mirabilem vero in concitato canenteque spiritu vim esse concedes, si Pythagoricis Platonisque concesseris coelum esse spiritum motibus tonisque suis omnia disponentem', *ibid.*, ed. Kaske and Clark, pp. 360–61.

⁶² Ficino, 'The Principles of Music', in Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, I, pp. 51–56. I am grateful for the use of an early draft of the translation of this letter to the members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, to be published in a forthcoming volume of the *Letters*.

is in some way dissonant from the first. But then the third sign, as though it were the model of the third note, looks upon the first constellation with that friendly aspect called sextile by astronomers.⁶³ He is suggesting, I conclude, that the way we listen to musical harmony is analogous to the way we perceive symbolic meaning in the heavens; that the two are manifestations of the same underlying cosmic law; and thus that the combination of musical and astrological expertise enables the listener to move beyond conceptual thought and differentiation to that level of perception where a congruence between outer and inner dimensions of experience can lead to healing, to a re-alignment of the fragmented soul.

For Ficino and his friends, this was the gift of Orpheus: that music and song could directly lead both player and listener to the marriage of philosophy and poetry, the uniting of mind and soul.

⁶³ 'invenies secundum ibi signum a primo quodammodo cadere, atque non aliter quam in vocibus secundam a prima vocem percipimus dissonantem ibi quoque secundum illud primo quodammodo dissonare; sed tertium deinde signum quasi tertiae vocis exemplar aspectu iam amico quem sextilem astronomi nominant primum sydus aspicere', *ibid.*, p. 55.

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FICINO, THERIACA AND THE STARS

Donald Beecher

The references to theriaca in Ficino's *Three Books on Life (De vita)* may be taken as a simple acknowledgment that this ancient pharmaceutical preparation retained its authority and its presumed efficacy as a general tonic and antidote down through the fifteenth century. In fact, it had stood the test of time, was sold widely, and prescribed for a host of maladies; hence it might well figure prominently in a treatise on health and good living—Ficino's was designed especially for those inclined to the melancholy of the sedentary and reflective life. But theriaca in any considered or analytical medical context was anything but a tried and proven remedy for simple maladies, like senna for a bound gut. It was and would remain throughout the following century-and-a-half not only a pharmaceutical icon, but a drug under empirical siege, and a site for philosophical debate over the nature of occult or unexplained pharmaceutical actions, as opposed to those deemed mechanical in accordance with the received doctrines concerning the humors. Even the simplest endorsement was, in effect, a statement in the phenomenology of occult medications. Ficino, in the first instance, may have intended nothing more than a frequent use of the drug in order to cleanse and prepare the body for the reception of astral virtues from the *spiritus mundi* through the humors and vital spirits of the body described by traditional medicine. But theriaca, itself, was composed of ingredients, each of which carried its own potential for astral fortification, and so might very well perform in the same talismanic way as the words, music, stones, jewelry, amulets, medals, and the multitude of other magically iconic objects which the *gens de bien* right up to the Medici kept around them in fifteenth-century Florence.¹

Theriaca was based on one of the most complex and exotic of all pharmaceutical formulae, and by dint of its ritualistic and often

¹ Paolo L. Rossi, 'Society, Culture and the Dissemination of Learning', in *Science, Culture and Popular Belief in Renaissance Europe*, ed. by Stephen Pumfrey, Paolo L. Rossi and Maurice Slawinski, Manchester, 1991, p. 157.

public preparation in Renaissance Europe was one of the most arcane, hence most potent, most costly, and most sought-after drugs of the era. Its history and traditions would fill a book, but in briefest résumé, its origins are to be traced to the Middle East, at least as far back as several centuries before the Christian era. Originally it was conceived as an *alexitére* or antidote to poisons and venoms, especially those caused by vipers and scorpions. Perhaps the earliest explanation of its powers was in isopathic terms, namely that elements that are pathogenic can also be used as counter agents. We call it immunization. Every theriaca of the ancients so conceived included among its ingredients elements of the agent which had caused the malady. The theriaca of Andromachus, for example, featured the flesh of the viper whose bite had injected the poison. Clifford Allbutt in his *Greek Medicine in Rome* explains that the snake was 'taken in the spring, was skinned, the head and tail were cut off, and the flesh was boiled with dill and salt; this product was kneaded up with toasted bread and served in boluses'.² Informing this confection was the principle that vipers were immune to their own venom, and that by causal extension, the flesh of such an animal, if consumed, would pass on those properties to the consumer. They believed, erroneously, however, that the venom of the viper was suffused throughout its flesh, and not contained in small sacs near the fangs. Had the former been the case, the poisoning would merely have been increased by a fortified dose of the same venom in the medication. It is a question of logic that hovers between occult and material causes. The question is whether the flesh of the viper must first become a symbol of itself before it assumes efficacy as a medical simple. The fifteenth-century thinkers were cognizant of the dilemma.

Mithridates VI Eupator, King of Pontus of legendary fame (120–63 BC), has been credited with launching theriaca on its long history as a polypharmaceutical. He was terrified by the prospect of his own death at the hands of the Romans by poisoning, and thus experimented over many years with toxins and their antidotes, many of which he took himself in small immunizing doses. His preferred procedure was to feed the royal ducks with a variety of poisons and then drink their blood.³ In his memory, the new and improved

² T. Clifford Allbutt, *Greek Medicine in Rome*, New York, 1970, p. 354.

³ Jacalyn Duffin, *History of Medicine*, Toronto, 1999, p. 95.

theriaca which he pioneered, with its 37 to 54 ingredients, was called *Mithridaticum*. Initially, its compound nature was merely an effort to combine all known antitoxins into one preparation so that a single medication would serve for all toxic substances. The recipe by Andromachus, still in use in the Renaissance, called for 64 ingredients, and Galen's version rose to 77.⁴

Theriaca survived the Middle Ages to become the *prima donna* of Renaissance pharmaceuticals. The Venetian productions of the 1540s called for 81 ingredients, only 61 of which were available to European apothecaries. The recipe thus required 20 substitutions, something that offered itself as a perpetual explanation for past failures. The Venetian Republic therefore financed one of the costliest of all humanist research projects of the era, the drive to recover, by botanical research throughout the Levant, all the missing ingredients of theriaca. By 1568, the number of missing simples had been reduced to only three.⁵ In effect, travelers, botanists, physicians, and diplomats had collaborated in restoring to first-hand knowledge nearly all of the thousand ingredients described in the pharmacopeia of Dioscorides. It was the Venetians' bid to remain at the forefront of suppliers to the European drug market, in competition with the Portuguese in the Far East and the Spanish in the New World, both returning to Europe with a vast number of new medical simples. The politics of theriaca in the sixteenth century witnessed a bitter dispute between the apothecaries and the medical faculties over who was to control the definition and production of the drug; the dispute was settled only after the matter had been submitted to the authority of the pope and the great Ulisse Aldrovandi had been dismissed from his university post.⁶

Theriaca, particularly of Venetian origin, was known throughout Europe, its value based on its quasi-mythic status and its mystical complexity. In fact its appeal was lasting, for not only had theriaca withstood attacks throughout the centuries beginning with Erasistratus of Alexandria who, at the beginning of the third century before Christ, scoffed at physicians who mixed metals, plants, and ingredients

⁴ Vivian Nutton, 'Roman Medicine 250 BC to AD 200', in *The Western Medical Tradition 800 BC to AD 1800*, ed. by Lawrence I. Conrad, Michael Neve, Vivian Nutton, Roy Porter, Andrew Wear, Cambridge, 1995, p. 56.

⁵ Andrew Wear, 'Medicine in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700', in *The Western Medical Tradition*, p. 305.

⁶ W. P. D. Wrightman, *Science and the Renaissance*, Edinburgh, 1962, p. 239.

of poisonous animals into preposterous medications, but it had survived the fourteenth century during which it had established a record of dismal failure as the preferred antidote to the plague, the causes of which were treated as toxins. It was the Galenic use of the preparation not only as an antidote but as a prophylactic against diseases in general, as a tonic and catholicon, that saved its credit.⁷ The drug was given a new lease on life in the sixteenth century, not only by the Venetian theriaca vendors, but also by the promotion of Galenic writings, among which there was a substantial treatise on theriaca.⁸ Moreover, there was a translation by Jacques Grévin into French of the treatise on theriaca by Nicander of Colophon, who was active in the second century BC. This publication, printed by Plantin in 1567, provided a full commentary and brought the constituents of the drug to a vernacular-reading public, much as Monardes was doing concurrently for drugs imported from the New World.⁹ And for the record, it was theriaca that declined into treacle in the nineteenth century, a general tonic based on molasses which, even in my youth, was still being administered under the name 'black strap' as a necessary accoutrement to growth, strength, and well-being, in the same category as cod-liver oil.

As a man who was the son of a surgeon, and who had studied medicine (though no record has been found of his ever having taken a degree), Ficino was well positioned to write on medical topics. And for all his interest in occult matter, properties, and functions, theriaca might well prove to be his drug of choice as a catholicon for those suffering from the diseases accompanying the intellectual life. In *De vita* he declares that 'theriac should never take second place to any remedy'.¹⁰ He pronounced it sovereign for building up particular parts of the body, the spirits, and the intelligence. Moreover, it was for him a tonic, a half dram of which should be taken twice weekly during the fall and winter, and once weekly during spring

⁷ Alain Touwaide, 'Therapeutic Strategies: Drugs', in *Western Medical Thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mirko D. Grmek, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1998, p. 268.

⁸ Galen, *De theriaca ad Pisonem liber*, in *Opera quae extant*, ed. by C. G. Kühn, 20 vols, Leipzig, 1821-33, XIV, pp. 210-310.

⁹ Nicholas Monardes, *Joyfull Newes out of the Newe Founde Worlde*, tr. by John Frampton (1580), introduced by Stephen Gaslee, London, 1925.

¹⁰ Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed. and tr. by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark, Binghamton, NY, 1989, I.24, p. 159.

and summer, six or seven hours before eating, and with two or three ounces of rose water or wine.¹¹ His reasoning was that all things antidotal to poison are good for health in general. Even their smells are salubrious, including that of theriaca, which he mentions in his chapter on smells.¹² Ambroise Paré, working in the mid-sixteenth century, corroborates this notion by urging that good theriaca should taste long and distinctly in the mouth, and should serve as protection from the plague much as posies of angelica were alleged to do.¹³ Ficino, likewise, in his chapter on the diet and mode of life for the elderly urges its use in the form of an electuary.¹⁴

Behind these recommendations is Ficino the medical philosopher. As with all other medical thinkers of the age, he was compelled to deal with the occult nature of drugs. Occult, in this case, designates simply that which produces palpable and predictable results for reasons that cannot be empirically explained. That fact has rarely stopped philosophers from hypothesizing causal explanations, however, and Ficino was no exception. Ambroise Paré in his carefully reasoned account of the coercive powers of theriaca paid close attention to questions of reason and the occult. He concluded that venoms work by occult means in accordance with a specific property. The only hope for victims was to be treated by an equally occult counteragent that rendered the toxin benign, or the body immune, or which sought out the toxin as a substance and destroyed it, or which provoked the body itself to expel the toxin before it took hold. Non-occult cures called merely for bleeding, or for altering the constitution of the body by fortifying it to resist on its own, or by provoking such evacuations as sweating or through upward and downward purges. Their lack of specificity and focus, however, caused Paré, too, to prefer the occult antidotes. He turned to the compounds such as theriaca which combined the antidote with a vast number of conventional alteratives, conditioners, and conductors. The roles of the 80 collaborating ingredients of theriaca were simultaneously rationalized on the basis of operations necessary for the expelling of poison.

Those medications prepared according to the Galenic system were

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I.12, pp. 139–41.

¹² *Ibid.*, II.18, p. 229.

¹³ Odet de Turnèbe, *Satisfaction All Around*, ed. by D. A. Beecher, Ottawa, 1979, p. 5.

¹⁴ Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, II.8, p. 189.

based fundamentally on the principle of opposites in relation to the humors; they were not considered occult. Where the body suffered from heat, the consumption of cold ingredients or the application of cold topicals was prescribed. Galen had begun the classification of simples according to the twelve degrees of intensity applicable to cold, hot, moist and dry substances, and the process was carried on throughout the Renaissance period with the discovery of each new simple. Lettuce was considered so cold an agent that it was held that inordinate consumption could cause sterility, for example, and mint generated an extensive literature over its degrees of heat or cold.¹⁵ Theriaca, as a compound, incorporated the reasonings of both systems, that of the occult drug targeting an occult pathogen, and of the counter-conditioners to bodily states profiled in Galenic terms, the most obvious being fevers and chills. With the system in place, controversies could follow. Grévin in his book *Des Venins* speaks of theriaca as resisting toxins not only by changing the condition of the body to resist, but by circulating its particular properties to all parts of the body. Paré would not go so far.¹⁶

Whenever Paré spoke of the attraction of venoms to venoms, he spoke only by analogy with such phenomena as straw to amber or iron flakes to the lodestone through their occult properties of attraction. That like would annul rather than compound the effect of like was entirely beyond explanation. Paré, for all his empirical care, was forced back upon the language of qualities, virtues, and metaphorical operations. By the homeopathic logic of pathogens in large amounts being controlled by the same agents in smaller amounts, minute doses of the venom of the scorpion could be counted on to spread through the body to encounter the foreign agents deposited by the scorpion's sting. To this end, the many additional simples in the recipe for theriaca served not only as conducting agents enabling the antidote to reach its target, but as alteratives, refrigerants, humectants, purgatives or any of a number of contributing operations useful in the purging of poison. This was the best that Renaissance medical logic could do, and we know, in retrospect, that the force of medications was largely in terms of what they 'must' do in accor-

¹⁵ Jacques Ferrand, *A Treatise on Lovesickness*, ed. by Donald Beecher and Massimo Ciavolella, Syracuse, NY, 1990, pp. 539-41.

¹⁶ Ambroise Paré, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by J.-F. Malgaigne, Geneva, 1970.

dance with the system of beliefs, rather than with what they actually did perform as efficient pharmaceuticals.

Yet there was one further dimension. In the background of that belief system based on counter-agencies and the occult properties of the magnet was the logic of magic—magic invested in the tradition of the recipes themselves, in the philosophical alignment of ingredients, in the notion of a symmetrical universe in which God provided for man through the medical simples in nature, all of which man was granted the intellectual gifts to discover. Drugs had always been occult in the properties of the medical simples themselves and their coercive forces, and in their capacities to target specific pathogens or produce specific reactions in the body. The effect of bringing the occult properties of medications into the sphere of Neoplatonic natural magic was to reread their secret properties as natural extensions of the macrocosmic and divine powers that suffuse the material world and that establish the relationships among things.

Ficino extends and interprets this tradition largely through his inclination to attribute the powers of medical simples and compounds to astral bodies, in the light of their presumed influences upon all aspects of human life. How immediate is the causation, how efficient, how much is theologically permitted, even necessitated, and how much forbidden? Ficino, like Bruno after him, was a brilliant maker of systems compounded out of ancient lore, the operations of the mind, the likenesses among things, and the belief in mystical properties—systems which he wielded as fictions, then as paradigms, and ultimately as operative powers. That he should extend the activity of celestial powers to the operations of pharmaceutical compounds is merely another dimension of his thought projected upon the concrete world of medical simples and their relationship to the body.

Ficino was in full agreement with those who prioritized natural laws in describing and diagnosing diseases. Nevertheless, he also felt compelled, as others were, to accede to the probable existence of remoter forces, namely the stars, demons, and practitioners of natural magic who employed the occult to effect their goals through natural law, the bodily spirits, the balance of humors, or the organs themselves. Causation was subdivided into material, efficient, and remote operations, so that multiple causes could be assigned to the same phenomenon; this was convenient indeed. The stars were at the dividing line between the material and spiritual worlds—an idea which the Renaissance mind could hardly leave alone. It was only

too reasonable to believe that the stars must have their indirect influences upon the earth according to the principle of correspondences and sympathetic alignments. By analogy with the plant world, the material heavens also required classification according to their properties of heat and cold: hence the heat of Mars, the sun and Jupiter, the cold moistness of Venus and the moon, and the extreme frigidity of Saturn—that great agent of the cold, dry disease of melancholy. Thus the healthy body will be ‘tempered into harmony with the heavens’,¹⁷ he declares, and will favor heat and moisture. Then the heart will be warm and dry, the brain cold and moist, the liver hot and humid.

Because of such systemic coordinates, the path lay open to speak of accommodating the body to the celestial, so that the body could reciprocally appropriate their powers. This, for Ficino, is a material and causal operation, through the simple isometric principle of the balance of opposites. It was hardly occult as an operation. But he continues by stating that there are ‘properties engrafted in things from the heavens and hidden from our senses’.¹⁸ Such properties, attributed to the cosmos, to the rays of stars, beyond our powers of rational explanation, affect the human spirits through celestial influences, as well as stones, minerals, the bezoar and unicorn’s horn, which receive their occult properties through the mediation of the Graces. Thus, in penetrating even into such antidotal elements as the bezoar stone, Ficino relegates the occult properties of the celestial powers to the occult simples and *alexiteres*—those medications specifically intended to counteract poisons.

At that juncture, he begins to study all of the occult medications. Peony strengthens spirits against epilepsy by infusing a vapor. Coral and chalcedony, imbued with powers from Jupiter and Venus, are good against the ‘delusions of black bile’. Myrobolans sharpen memory and intelligence. Ginger in foods prevents fainting because it is aligned through its heat with the powers of the sun. By Jupiter’s power sage drives out paralysis.¹⁹ In this way, natural and elementary properties gain celestial reinforcement so that even the force of soporifics, humectants, and astringents are reified by the stars. Imagine then how theriaca, with its 70 to 80 ingredients becomes a celestial

¹⁷ Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, III.12, p. 299.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

symphony, or perhaps cacophony, insofar as each contributing operation of the whole must find its rationale in harmony with its efficient causes up and down the grand system of correspondences.

Through his doctrines of astral correspondences, Ficino posited the great force of the world soul in the bodies of the heavens. *De vita* could thus be read as a handbook for living one's life in harmony with the cosmic forces in all the practical ways imaginable. Ficino's challenge was to find forms of human agency to bring this to pass without entering into the realms of forbidden magic wherein the actual manipulation of occult words, emblems, and objects results in making contact with malign forces. Ficino's astral medicine is based on a remote sympathetic magic that naturally inheres in things because they share the same properties or consonances. The apothecary like the philosopher 'reads' these symmetries in the natural world, and between worlds, seeing in the macrocosm the signs and properties that link those forces to elements in the microcosm. In these terms, the compounding of theriaca was an operation in the appropriation of magical forces through a strategic association of ingredients fortified by their peculiar celestial properties. The recipe for theriaca was a calibration of complementary ingredients predicated upon astral symmetries and properties, confirmed in their harmony through their beneficial effects upon the human body. Its composition was a concentration of astral powers, its force talismanic, its confectioner the mere servant of nature itself, its essence cosmic and harmonious.

As a result of Ficino's alignment of material and celestial systems, their presumed correspondences, and imputed causes, the *Three Books on Life*, as Nancy Siraisi points out, became 'one of the most famous and influential Renaissance accounts of astral magic',²⁰ and by extension one of the most sustained treatments of astrological medicine. The paradox here lies in the fact that the foundational notions are entirely traditional, harking back to Dioscorides's theories concerning the divine origins of all *pharmaka* by which they are all perceived as having certain spiritual powers.²¹ Moreover, that the very compounding of medical simples into complex recipes required the careful skills of specialists and was hence tantamount to a form of ritual

²⁰ Nancy Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice*, Chicago, 1990, p. 152.

²¹ Touwaide, 'Therapeutic Strategies', p. 265.

magic was recognized by Herophilus as early as the post-Alexandrine period in ancient Greece. Yet there is a quality of brinkmanship in Ficino's investment of *materia medica* with celestial powers simply because the natural magic of their innate properties takes on overtones of manipulative magic once they are philosophically conceived to achieve occult ends through composition. Nevertheless, the essence of theriaca as an 'idea' would have been irresistible to the philosophical syncretist in Ficino whose interests covered natural philosophy, medicine, astrology and magic. Theriaca is a nexus for all these interests superimposed in a single compound, one which, for its presumed perfection as a catholicon, was to pharmacology, by the logic of celestial harmony, what the elixir was to an alchemist; it was materialized philosophy. Even if Arnald of Villanova had already given up by the 1290s rationalizing the mechanical relationships of simples within compound drugs,²² the physician in Ficino could still, in keeping with his own age, endorse theriaca with the power of faith.

Bono has shown in other ways that astrological theology incorporates a form of astrological medicine.²³ It comes about through a reading of the operations of traditional medicine in the terms of the Neoplatonic world-soul and the powers invested in the celestial macrocosm *vis-à-vis* the material world. Because of the fundamental symmetry in the world system, such philosophically designed compounds as theriaca take on talismanic properties through the natural magic whereby things analogous assume reciprocal powers. The apothecary is both magus and natural philosopher in his capacity to 'read' the symmetries that exist between the upper and lower worlds. His compounds embody a concentration of astral powers, while the confectioner remains merely ancillary to nature itself. The theriaca of the ancients began as a panoply of antidotes. Without changing the fundamental design of the recipe, Ficinian logic endows theriaca with the powers of astral reinforcement, so accounting for its occult properties in general. While the *alexiterè* of Mithridates had become with Galen a general catholicon, with Ficino it acquires the potency of a talisman capable of inducing the stars to send down their beneficent powers. This electuary gains thereby its own microcosmic status and

²² Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, p. 146.

²³ James Bono, *The Word of God and the Languages of Man: Interpreting Nature in Early Modern Science and Medicine*, Madison, Wis., 1995-, vol. I, 'Ficino to Descartes', p. 34.

its place as one of the *meraviglie* of the age. It was a mythic status that was not ultimately dismantled until William Heberden, in his essay of 1745 on *Mithridaticum* and theriaca, had it expelled from the official pharmacopoeia.

Common sense, at this point, would seem to call for yet another attack upon Renaissance scientific methodology, or another qualified defence of 'the best they could do' in relation to their philosophical systems and the current state of scientific knowledge. There are no other alternatives, short of endorsing Ficino's concept of the world-soul. In 'Some Sources of Herman Boerhave's Concept of Fire', Rosaleen Love says of Ficino that he led the way in setting up a method of analysis in search of a philosophy of unity that could be achieved only by assuming 'an internal unity between the object and its symbol such that the word and the thing, merging together, become interchangeable in argument'.²⁴ Ficino had an instinctive tendency to work by analogies, developing relationships between things that are then taken as fact. His cognitive processes are conditioned by notions of forces, rays, mutual vapors, meaningful motions, symmetries, and symbols. Where they share characteristics they share causes. There are no symbolic irrelevancies, only reconfigurations. Words take on talismanic powers. He had not only read the physicians, but also writers like Iamblichus who said that materials aligned to celestial powers can be collected, compounded at propitious times, and by the use of set formulae can receive forces 'not only celestial, but even daemonic and divine'.²⁵ Serapion, Haly Abbas, Porphyry, and Philo of Alexandria were sources of similar notions. Brian Vickers, in a full study of such methodologies, concludes that the entire age, by habit and authority, was uncritical of its use of metaphorical language in the description of things, and in their capacity to confuse those words for the things themselves; it was a 'cognitive process', in his words, a way of seeing the world.²⁶

E. H. Gombrich explains the slippage as a transference of meaning from sign to substance, 'for if the usual symbol is not a conventional sign but linked through the network of correspondence and

²⁴ Rosaleen Love, 'Some Sources of Herman Boerhave's Concept of Fire', *Ambix*, 19 (1972), pp. 157-74, esp. p. 161.

²⁵ Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, III.13, pp. 307 and 441, n. 10.

²⁶ Introduction to *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, ed. by B. Vickers, Cambridge, 1984, pp. 1-55, and his article 'Analogy Versus Identity: The Rejection of Occult Symbolism, 1580-1680', pp. 95-163, at p. 95.

sympathies with the supracelestial essence which it embodies, it is only consistent to expect it to partake not only of the "meaning" and "effect" of what it represents but to become interchangeable with it.²⁷ Ficino could have disciplined himself by rereading the *Theaetetus* where Plato cautions against the unguarded use of analogy or resemblances, calling them very slippery elements,²⁸ or he could have consulted Aristotle's *Metaphysics* where the coryphaeus of western philosophy says that to convert forms into models and then derive particulars from them is senseless and illogical.²⁹ But this broadside is now old news and need not detain us. The fact remained for Ficino that medications had to be efficient if the medical profession was to preserve its credibility, and a few had proven to be so—particularly the laxatives, soporifics, vomitives, and diuretics. Because of perceived likenesses in things, and through their habits of grouping, causal relationships became the subject of testing and observation, as well as of philosophical assertions whereby the thinker engages in the 'materialization of spirit'.³⁰ That Ficino's planetary gods, anthropomorphic virtues, and animistic presences could become causal forces in medications was one of his more ingenious inventions, extending into the new occult vocabularies the whole discussion of the occult powers of medications.

What can be said that is neither an assault upon Ficino nor a quaint rationalization of his methods on historical grounds? Alas, I have been unable to find it. There is only the observation for its own sake that Ficino's categories of analysis led him to grant full causal efficiency to the spiritual powers that inform occult medical simples, and so to draw the materials of medicine into his encyclopedic and unified cosmos. It was his bid to do for science what we credit to Newton or to Einstein, namely to anatomize the laws that hold the secret to the organization of the universe. Just as Newton was said to have brought a kind of harmony through laws to our understanding of nature, Ficino sought, in true medieval fashion, the harmony in things that linked the highest to the lowest. In the specific case of theriaca he declared that 'Andromachus wore himself out

²⁷ E. H. Gombrich, 'Icones Symbolicae', in his *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, London, 1972, pp. 123-95, 228-35 (p. 172).

²⁸ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 231A.

²⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1079b.

³⁰ Vickers, *Occult and Scientific Mentalities*, p. 17.

for ages compounding theriac, and finally, after all that effort, he found the power of theriac by divine destiny,³¹ and in the process he makes of the treaclesmith a magus and prophet. Theriaca, by the laws of its composition, was a performing entity of cosmic philosophy. The mind set which endorses these relations between spirit and matter signals a phase in the history of human cognition predicated perhaps on a need for security in a world deemed hostile for having so much unrelated diversity. By inference drawn from symbols and categories, Ficino helped to soothe anxieties about the unknown.

Or, for the sake of play, we can restate the operation performed by Ficino in accommodating the occult properties attributed to drugs to celestial powers in a different vocabulary. One of the capacities of human cognition is to dwell upon the causal relations among things. Quite simply, the brain, on a day to day basis, finds itself stressed by data that cannot be reconciled to expectations based on memory and experience. If that data in any way relates to probabilities concerning well-being or survival, including perceived threats from other persons, whole neural networks are set in motion to alert the cerebral cortex to scan the horizons more intently for information that will resolve the incomplete, the equivocal, or the contradictory. We are speaking in the broadest of terms about primary cognition, the simple identification of things in ways necessary to basic orientation and survival. All other forms of cognition are derived from and conditioned by those same operations and the complementary mental properties and circuitry that give to consciousness its urgency and focus. Through intensified attention, the brain sets up its own hyperactive process of identification, analysis, categorization, and inference. These are philosophical metaphors for patterns of neural firings. We speak of neuro-phenomenological states of anxiety as a by-product of disorientation and reorientation caused by environmental stressors.

In the realm of speculative thought, the occult properties of medications are one such cognitive stressor. There is even a direct survival factor in explaining the inherent properties of medications; it is for some in the profession a matter of philosophical imperative. As with much such data that will not yield to empirical explanation,

³¹ Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, III.21, p. 357.

the mind seeks what comfort it can find in the truth of categories in which these things can be positioned through a process of analogy, and from which inferences can then be drawn. Steven Pinker in *How the Mind Works* calls this patterning impulse 'pattern-associator neural networks'.³² That is to say, the brain conveniently makes mental boxes as comparative reference points for all incoming stimuli. They are useful because some of the world's stimuli fit the boxes nicely. As he says, 'real science is famous for transcending fuzzy feelings of similarity and getting at underlying laws',³³ and yet he is the first to admit that even modern science carries with it a number of fuzzy boxes. Intuitive theory is a way of handling the discrepancies between data and boxes. The question of *materia medica* and efficient causation is one compelling area of fuzziness. It is a site for the demonstration of the messiness of reality, alien to the mind grounded in the manufacturing of systems. Theriaca, by its very existence, turns natural philosophers into whistlers in the dark. Ficino, given his categorizing habits, was prepared, in the case of theriaca, to ease his cognitive stress by drawing upon a whole system of Neoplatonic analogies by which things are related to things by reducing them to symbols of themselves within boxes. Clearly what is known is not hard-wired in the brain, but the ways of knowing more than likely are. What we are seeing in Ficino's performance is evidence of the latter: when the would-be scientific mind is confronted by threateningly intransigent data, that state of mind we call suspense (as a threshold emotion seeking resolution) will force the cerebral cortex to seek comfort in the reassurances of myth; hence theriaca and the stars.

³² Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works*, New York, 1997, p. 308.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

CONCEPTS OF SEEDS AND NATURE IN THE WORK OF MARSILIO FICINO

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(translated by Valery Rees)

1. Introduction

Marsilio Ficino of Florence (1433–99), the eminent translator of and commentator on Plato and Plotinus, was himself a Platonic philosopher who exercised an immense influence on western thought of the sixteenth century and later.¹ As recent studies by M. J. B. Allen have shown, the Florentine was following the Neoplatonists, most notably Plotinus and Proclus, in his interpretation of the work of Plato.² The studies of B. P. Copenhaver have demonstrated that the same is true for his occult doctrines.³ As far as his metaphysics and cosmology are concerned, in comparison to notions such as Ideas, ‘reasons’ and forms, it seems that his concept of seeds has not yet been systematically explored. However, while Kristeller’s ground-breaking study

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¹ See R. Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, Paris, 1958; P. O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by V. Conant, New York, 1943; repr. Gloucester, Mass., 1964; idem, ‘Marsilio Ficino and his Work after Five Hundred Years’, in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Studi e documenti*, ed. by G. C. Garfagnini, 2 vols, Florence, 1986, I, pp. 15–196 (a second enlarged edition of this article was published separately in Florence, 1987).

² See the articles collected in his *Plato’s Third Eye: Studies in Marsilio Ficino’s Metaphysics and its Sources*, Aldershot, 1995; also his studies in *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer*, Berkeley etc., 1981; *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of his ‘Phaedrus’ Commentary, its Sources and Genesis*, Berkeley etc., 1984; *Icastes: Marsilio Ficino’s Interpretation of Plato’s ‘Sophist’*, Berkeley etc., 1989; *Nuptial Arithmetic: Ficino’s Commentary on the Fatal Number in Book VIII of Plato’s ‘Republic’*, Berkeley etc., 1994; and *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Florence, 1998.

³ B. P. Copenhaver, ‘Natural Magic, Hermetism, and Occultism in Early Modern Science’, in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. by D. C. Lindberg and R. S. Westman, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 261–301. For his other works, see n. 44 below.

of Ficino's philosophy, which is focused mainly on his metaphysics, barely treats of it, F. A. Yates's analysis of *De vita coelitus comparanda* clearly shows the presence of the concept of seeds in Ficino, as does a chapter in M. C. Horowitz's recent *Seeds of Virtue and Knowledge*.⁴

One might suppose that Ficino's revival of the doctrine of *logoi spermatikoi* dates from the time of his translation of Plotinus. In fact Ficino used several terms to designate the 'seminal principles' in his philosophical works: terms such as 'seeds of things' (*semina rerum*), 'seeds of forms' (*semina formarum*), 'seminal reasons' or 'seminal reason-principles' (*rationes seminales*), 'seminary of the world' (*seminarium mundi*) and 'seminal reason of the world' (*ratio seminaria mundi*).⁵ This multiplication of terms derived from 'seed' is unparalleled in his Latin predecessors after St Augustine. Given the paucity of work devoted to this topic, we cannot attempt an exhaustive evaluation here. But to sketch the broad outlines, we shall examine some of his key philosophical texts: the commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, one of his most popular writings; the commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, important for its cosmology and its philosophy of nature; the *Platonic Theology on the immortality of souls*, his major work; the *De vita coelitus comparanda* (Book III of *De vita libri tres*), which was a highly influential compendium of magical medicine; and finally the commentary on the *Enneads* of Plotinus, one of his later works.⁶

2. *The Commentary on Plato's Symposium*

In the commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, otherwise called *De amore*, Ficino touches on the problem of Platonic cosmogony.⁷ According

⁴ F. A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, London, 1964, pp. 64–67; W. D. Müller-Jahncke, *Astrologische-magische Theorie und Praxis in der Heilkunde der frühen Neuzeit*, Stuttgart, 1985, pp. 47–48; M. C. Horowitz, *Seeds of Virtue and Knowledge*, Princeton, 1998, pp. 81–95.

⁵ The Latin term *seminarium*, which means 'seedbed', has a modern equivalent 'seminary' that no longer corresponds to the original sense. But I respect the terminology of Ficino in using 'seminary' instead of 'seedbed'. As for the term *ratio*, I use both 'reason' and 'reason-principle' interchangeably.

⁶ The original version of the present article is to be found in my doctoral thesis, *Le concept de semence dans les théories de la matière à la Renaissance: de Marsile Ficin à Pierre Gassendi*, Université de Lille 3, 1999, pp. 23–41. This thesis, for which I was awarded the *prix des jeunes historiens* of the Académie Internationale d'Histoire des Sciences, will be published in the Académie's *Collection of Studies* series by Brepols.

⁷ See M. J. B. Allen, 'Cosmogony and Love: The Role of Phaedrus in Ficino's

to his modern biographer, Raymond Marcel, he composed the work between November 1468 and July 1469, then revised it from 1469 until (at the latest) 1482 and finally published it with his translations of Plato in Florence in 1484. The commentary was widely read and very influential among humanists and men of letters in the sixteenth century, particularly for its doctrine of Platonic love.⁸ Taking his works as a whole, this book may be said to mark the first stage of Ficino's career.

In his discussion of cosmogony, Ficino explicitly invokes the concept of seeds:

From this it is clearly apparent to us why the theologians place the Good in the centre and Beauty on the circumference. It is plain that, on the one hand, the Good that is in all things is God Himself, through whom all things are good, and that Beauty is the ray of God, spreading through those four circles that somehow rotate about him. Such a ray forms in those four circles all the species of all things that we are accustomed to call 'Ideas' when they are in angelic Mind, 'reasons' when they are in the soul, 'seeds' when they are in nature, and 'forms' when they are in matter. That is why four expressions of beauty are manifested in the four circles, the splendour of Ideas in the first circle, that of reasons in the second, that of seeds in the third, and that of forms in the last.⁹

We can readily understand these four circles in the light of three of the hypostases (divine Mind, Soul and Body). In effect, the first

Symposium Commentary, *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 10 (1980), pp. 131–53 (reprinted in *Plato's Third Eye*). I used the text in M. Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, ed. and tr. by R. Marcel, Paris, 1956. See also Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, tr. by Sears Jayne, 2nd edn, Dallas, Tex., 1985; and Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basel, 1576, pp. 1320–63. The Basel edition is by no means free from mistakes but is the most readily available, being reprinted in Turin, 1959, 1962, 1979, 1983, and, with a preface by S. Toussaint, Paris, 2000.

⁸ For its influence, see, for example, A.-J. Festugière, *La philosophie de l'amour de Marsile Ficin et son influence sur la littérature française du XVI^e siècle*, Paris, 1941.

⁹ 'Iam igitur quam ob causam bonitatem in centro, in circulo pulchritudinem theologi collocent, aperte intelligere possumus. Bonitas siquidem rerum omnium unus ipse est deus, per quem cuncta sunt bona; pulchritudo autem, dei radius quatuor illis insitus circulis circa deum quodammodo revolutis. Huiusmodi radius omnes rerum omnium species in quatuor illis effingit. Species illas in mente ideas, in anima rationes, in natura semina, in materia formas appellare solemus. Idcirco quatuor in circulis, quatuor splendores esse videntur. Idearum splendor in primo, Rationum in secundo, in tertio seminum, formarum in ultimo.' *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis*, II.3 (ed. Marcel, p. 149). See also M. J. B. Allen, 'Marsilio Ficino on Plato, the Neoplatonists and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 37 (1984), pp. 555–84, esp. pp. 572–73 (reprinted in *Plato's Third Eye*).

circle signifies the intelligible world, which contains the Ideas. The second is the soul (more particularly, the World-Soul) which comprises the reasons (or reason-principles) of things. The last corresponds to the body, that is to the body of the world, or the *machina mundi*, which holds the elemental forms. Between the soul and the body (or matter) Ficino introduces an intermediate stage. This is 'nature'. For him, it is to nature that the 'seeds of things' must be attributed. Beginning with the One or God in His transcendence, there are thus five hypostases in his system.¹⁰ Nevertheless, throughout his career, Ficino was hesitant with regard to the nature of this fourth stage, calling it sometimes 'quality', sometimes 'nature'.¹¹ He explains the relationship of these notions as follows:

The forms of the body are in fact brought back to God through the seeds, the seeds by the reasons, the reasons by the Ideas and they are brought forth by God in this same order. . . . Zoroaster says that there are three princes in this world, masters of the three orders. . . . Plato calls them: God, Mind, Soul. Further, he establishes three orders in the divine species, that is to say Ideas, reasons and seeds. Consequently, the 'first', that is, the Ideas, 'rotate about the first', that is, about God because they were given by God to the mind and they lead back to God the mind to which they were given.¹²

In Ficino, Ideas, reasons, seeds and forms are all 'species'. The Ideas are the intermediary between God and the mind, and they allow communication between these two hypostases. In the same manner, the reasons have their existence between the mind and the soul,

¹⁰ On the doctrine of five hypostases, see Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 106–08, 167–69, 266, 370, 384 and 400–01. His views have been corrected by M. J. B. Allen, 'Ficino's Theory of the Five Substances and the Neoplatonists' *Parmenides*, *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 12 (1982), pp. 19–44 (reprinted in *Plato's Third Eye*). See also T. Albertini, *Marsilio Ficino. Das Problem der Vermittlung von Denken und Welt in einer Metaphysik der Einfachheit*, Munich, 1997.

¹¹ On 'quality' in Ficino, see Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 107–08; idem, *Marsilio Ficino and his Work after Five Hundred Years*, p. 27, n. 29; M. J. B. Allen, 'The Absent Angel in Ficino's Philosophy', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36 (1975), pp. 219–40, esp. pp. 225–26 (reprinted in *Plato's Third Eye*).

¹² 'Formae enim corporum per semina, haec per rationes, hae per ideas reducuntur in deum et iisdem a deo gradibus producuntur. . . . Tres mundi principes posuit Zoroaster, trium ordinum dominos. . . . Hos Plato deum, mentem, animam nuncupat. Tres autem ordines in divinis posuit spetiebus: ideas, rationes et semina. Prima igitur, id est ideae, circa primum, id est circa deum, quoniam a deo menti tributae sunt et in eundem mentem cui sunt datae reducunt.' *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis*, II.4 (ed. Marcel, pp. 150–51). Cf. Plato, *Second Letter*, 312E; M. J. B. Allen, 'Marsilio Ficino on Plato', pp. 571–80.

seeds between the soul and nature, and forms between nature and matter. We also observe that 'nature' is identified with the 'power of generation' (*potentia generandi*) and the seeds pass into it through the soul (*per animam transeunt in naturam*). According to Ficino, the corporeal forms do not, however, disclose the divine. 'The Ideas, the reasons and the seeds are the realities, while the corporeal forms are rather the shadows of these real things.' Thus the shadows do not manifest the actual nature of divine things.¹³ For him, in comparison to the Good, which is pre-eminently God's being, beauty is an 'act', and is identified with the ray of emanation from the Good, which penetrates everything. This ray first penetrates the angelic mind, then the soul, nature and finally corporeal matter. On this, Ficino says, 'This ray embellishes the mind with the hierarchy of Ideas, it fills the soul with the series of reasons, it fertilizes nature with seeds, and it embellishes matter with forms.'¹⁴ For him, just as a single ray of the Sun gives light to the four elements, so does the ray of God illumine the four lower hypostases. Thus whoever contemplates beauty in these four circles sees in them the splendour of God. This ray contains the reason-principles of all things in the form of seeds.¹⁵ God, the architect of the world, can only touch the 'world machine' through His divine light.¹⁶

For Ficino, love, which creates and sustains all things, communicates to all beings the 'desire to multiply'. On account of that desire, divine spirits move the heavens and pour out their gifts upon the creatures. By its grace, the stars spread their light among the elements. Plants and animals 'desire' to pour out their seeds to beget their own kind. This desire, innate in all things, to propagate their own perfection accounts for the implicit fecundity concealed in all beings. It compels the seeds to germinate and draws out the powers of each from within itself. It initiates the conception of a foetus and brings it into the light.¹⁷ This is how in the human body love excites the seed and gives birth to the 'desire for procreation'.¹⁸ Ficino thinks that if the seeds of all things proper to a body are sown in it from the beginning, the soul, which is superior to the body, should

¹³ *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis*, II.4 (ed. Marcel, p. 151).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II.5 (ed. Marcel, p. 152).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, and VI.7 (ed. Marcel, p. 209).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, IV.5 (ed. Marcel, p. 173).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, III.2 (ed. Marcel, p. 161).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, VI.11 (ed. Marcel, p. 225).

be much richer and must possess from the beginning the seeds of all that is proper to it. For this reason, the human soul has in equal measure the reason-principles of morality, the arts and the sciences. If these reasons are well 'cultivated', they bear their fruits.¹⁹

In our view of his theories, for Ficino the forms are enclosed in a sphere between the corporeal world and the incorporeal, that is to say between matter and nature. Nature is identified as the 'power of generation'. The seeds of nature, on the other hand, are assigned to a sphere located between the soul and nature. It would therefore be reasonable to suppose that Ficino's seeds are incorporeal. They issue from the reasons which reside in the soul and bind the Mind to the soul. The reasons of things are derived from Ideas which are within the divine Mind. Thus the seeds of things share the same divine source as the reasons and the Ideas which are above them, and the forms which are below them. These 'divine species' are carried by the divine light that emanates from a transcendent God.

3. *The Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*

Ficino also published the first version of his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* in the Latin Plato of 1484.²⁰ This treatise is one of his earliest commentaries on the dialogues of Plato. As M. J. B. Allen has shown, although Ficino knew the ancient commentaries of Chalcidius and the School of Chartres on this dialogue, especially that of William of Conches, he preferred to follow Plotinus and Proclus in expounding its main topic. The essential theme of this dialogue is 'nature' (*physis*). We should recall that Proclus explains this notion at the beginning of his commentary on the *Timaeus*. In his opinion, Plato refused to give the name of 'nature' to matter, to form embodied in matter, to body or to natural qualities; at the same time he hesitated to call it 'soul'. He explains Plato's views on *physis* thus:

¹⁹ Ibid., VI.12 (ed. Marcel, p. 226).

²⁰ See M. J. B. Allen's searching discussion in 'Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* and its Myth of the Demiurge', in *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. by J. Hankins, J. Monfasani and F. Purnell, Jr., Binghamton, NY, 1987, pp. 399-439 (reprinted in *Plato's Third Eye*). See also J. Hankins, 'The Study of the *Timaeus* in Early Renaissance Italy', in *Natural Particulars: Nature and the Disciplines in Renaissance Europe*, ed. by A. Grafton and N. Siraisi, Cambridge, Mass., 1999, pp. 77-119. For lack of a modern critical edition, the text used here is the version published in the Basel *Opera omnia*.

[Plato] has provided us with the most accurate theory of nature by placing the essence of nature between these two, I mean, between the soul and the corporeal properties, since it is, on the one hand, lower than the soul, by virtue of the fact that it is split up within the body and does not return to itself; but it is on the other hand, higher than what comes after it, by virtue of the fact that it contains the *logoi* of all beings and it begets them all and gives them life.²¹

In fact, for him, the soul is separate from the body, whereas nature is immersed in the body and is inseparable. The soul spreads the light of life over nature. Thus he says, 'Nature comes last of all among the causes that produce the corporeal and the sensible world here below; she marks the boundary of the scheme of incorporeal essences, and is filled with *logoi* and *dynameis* by means of which she directs encosmic beings . . . and guides the whole world with her powers'.²² Moreover, Proclus believes that Plato's nature sustains the harmony of the heavens, and, by this means, governs the sublunary world and weaves together all the individual beings with the whole. Thus nature pervades all without any obstacle, and gives life to all things with her 'breath' (*pneuma*). For Proclus, even the most inanimate beings share in a sort of soul or life and remain in the world eternally, since they are preserved by the causes belonging to the species that nature keeps within herself.²³

After this exposition of Proclus, Ficino defines nature, the subject of the *Timaeus*. He finds within nature the causes of the species that she holds within herself in the form of seeds. He speaks of this in the following terms:

The subject of the book, then, is to be universal nature itself, that is to say, a seminal, life-giving [power], infused through the whole world, subject to the World-Soul, presiding over matter and giving birth to things in the same order as the soul itself conceives them, while it is both receiving the divine Mind and desiring the Good.²⁴

²¹ Proclus, *Commentaire sur le Timée*, I, Prologue (ed. Festugière, Paris, 1966-69, I, p. 36).

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁴ 'Sit ergo huius libri subiectum ipsa universa natura, id est, seminaria quaedam & vivifica virtus toti infusa mundo, animo quidem mundanae subdita, materiae vero praesidens eodemque ordine singula pariens, quo & anima ipsa concepit, tam divinam suscipiens mentem, quam appetens bonum.' In *Timaeum commentarium*, ch. 1, *Opera omnia*, p. 1438. On the idea of 'nature' in Ficino, see P. O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 67-70.

Here the position of nature is held to be between the soul and matter, as had already been shown in the commentary on the *Symposium*. What is important is that Ficino characterizes nature as life-giving, 'seminal' (*seminaria*), and diffused throughout the whole universe. He is surely speaking of a 'universal seedbed' (*panspermia*).

The purpose of Ficino's exposition is to show that the Christian doctrine of the book of Genesis can be reconciled with the Platonic or Pythagorean doctrine of the *Timaeus*. He affirms that the intelligible world exists between the corporeal world and the *exemplar* (the divine Idea) of the Good. He then establishes six stages of emanation from the One, leading to the generation of multiplicity in terrestrial things, and he takes the Sun as an example. As the six stages of the Sun, he enumerates: 1) the substance of the Sun; 2) the brilliance (*lux*) of its substance; 3) the light (*lumen*) which emanates from it; 4) its splendour (*splendor*); 5) its heat (*calor*); and 6) generation (*generatio*). For the universe, his list is, first, the divine One, then in second place the Good.²⁵ The third stage is the divine Mind emanating like the light from the brilliance. This contains within itself the multi-form Ideas issuing from a double store, from the brilliance and from the supreme Idea of the One;²⁶ and it forms the archetypal universe. Ficino's argument continues:

After this archetypal world, in the fourth stage, follows the soul of the corporeal world. The rational world is generated from the intellectual world as splendour is generated by light. And as splendour is mingled with movement, the soul, coming from the unmoving Ideas, reaches and pervades the reasons where it conforms to a moving order. The fifth stage follows this, that is, the very nature of things. Now the 'seminal world' results from the rational world of the soul, just as heat follows splendour. In the sixth stage, this corporeal world is established, being the last thing to be drawn from the 'seminal [world]', just as generation is the last to be drawn from heat.²⁷

²⁵ *In Timaeum commentarium*, ch. 10, *Opera omnia*, p. 1442.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ 'Post archetypum hunc mundum quarto gradu sequatur corporei mundi anima: Mundus iam rationalis ex intellectuali mundo progenitus, quasi splendor ex lumine. Et sicut splendor iam motui permiscetur, sic anima immobilium idearum rationes mobili quodam pacto attingit atque percurrit. Quintus huic succedat gradus, ipsa videlicet natura rerum, mundus iam seminarius ex rationali animae mundo, quasi calor splendore resultans. Sexto tandem gradu mundus hic corporeus collocetur, ex seminario ita proxime ductus, sicut rerum generatio ex calore.' *Ibid.*

In this scheme of things, nature is placed in the fifth stage. Here nature is called the 'seminal world' (*mundus seminarius*), mirroring the supposition that the divine Mind is the 'intellectual' or 'intelligible world' and that the World-Soul is the 'rational world'. If the Soul is seen as the splendour of the Sun that emanates from the Mind (as light), then nature corresponds to heat. We observe that generation requires heat because it is strongly bound to a biological and embryological interpretation in Ficino, especially to the notion of fecundity. Thus, from the same perspective, nature, where so much generation takes place, is quite naturally conceived of as 'very fecund'. This fecundity is spread throughout nature by way of the 'seeds of forms' which come from the reason-principles in the World-Soul.

Ficino then explains the number of elements in the universe. He says that there are four: for metaphysicians these are essence, being, power and action; for mathematicians, point, line, plane and volume; and for natural philosophers, nature's 'seminal power', natural multiplication, mature form and arrangement (*compositum*).²⁸ Ficino parallels 'essence' with both the geometric point and the 'seminal power', 'being' with the line and multiplication, 'power' with the plane and form, and finally 'action' with volume and arrangement.²⁹ Thus we find that his concept of seeds also reflects the idea of the Pythagorean 'primordial seminal point', which would confirm an idea suggested in his treatise on the Fatal Number.³⁰ Then he explains the four elements from the point of view of Pythagorean and Platonic geometry and music theory. He tries to supersede Aristotle's theory on the substance of the heavens (which has no place for the four elements), declaring:

No one can deny that these elements exist, at least beneath the Moon. Some natural philosophers will deny that they exist in the heavens. But I would ask them to listen to the metaphysicians proving that the elements are in the Artificer of the universe himself as Ideas, and thence in the World-Soul as reasons, and in nature as seeds. So they are in the heavens as powers and in the sublunary world as forms.³¹

²⁸ *Ibid.*, ch. 21, *Opera omnia*, p. 1447.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, ch. 22, *Opera omnia*, p. 1447.

³⁰ See M. J. B. Allen, *Nuptial Arithmetic*, pp. 48 and 54.

³¹ 'Esse utique elementa haec sub luna, nemo negabit. Esse vero in coelo, physici nonnulli negabunt. Sed isti audiant metaphysicos precor, probantes elementa per ideas suas esse in ipso mundi opifice: esse inde in anima mundi per rationes suas, esse in natura per semina. Ergo & in coelo per virtutes: sub coelo per formas.' *In Timaeum commentarium*, ch. 24, *Opera omnia*, p. 1448.

Ficino is here maintaining five orders of divine species (ideas, reasons, seeds, powers and forms) in the five substances under God, (Mind, Soul, Nature, Heaven and Matter).

By contrast, in the appendix to the commentary on the *Timaeus* Ficino seems to prefer to use the term 'seminal reasons' (*rationes seminales*) rather than 'seeds' (*semina*) or 'seminary' (*seminarium*). He argues that the four elements are not the 'principles', both because matter and form are prior to them and because the four causes (divine, efficient, 'exemplary' and final) as well as the seminal reasons are prior to all of them.³² For Ficino, many different sorts of seminal reasons are divinely implanted within the four elements. By these, the diverse forms of things are engendered in all the elements and their various combinations, with the movement of the heavens assisting these reasons.³³

4. *The Platonic Theology*

Soon after the commentary on the *Symposium*, Ficino composed the *Platonic Theology on the immortality of souls* (1469–74), which was published in Florence in 1482.³⁴ In this major philosophical work he naturally stresses the third hypostasis, for it is about the soul. But we can also find there further treatment of the topic of nature and her seeds.

First, Ficino explains that the work of the soul is to provide 'vital movement' and that of the mind is to organize 'by forms'. In his view, the mind surpasses the soul to the degree that the order of forms extends further than life. Then he introduces the concept of seeds as 'rudiments of forms' (*formarum inchoationes*):

But because beyond the order of forms is the universe's formless prime matter—where certain seeds of forms lie hidden and ferment, if I may put it like that—the office of mind, which is bounded by forms, does not embrace these formless seeds. Yet matter is in a way good because it is desirous of the good, namely of form, and because it is open to receiving the good, and because it is necessary for a good world. Seeds also are good as they are the rudiments of good forms. Goodness

³² *Ibid.*, appendix, ch. 33, *Opera omnia*, p. 1474.

³³ *Ibid.*, appendix, ch. 45, *Opera omnia*, p. 1475.

³⁴ The text used here is Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne de l'immortalité des âmes*, ed. and tr. by R. Marcel, 3 vols, Paris, 1964–70.

exceeds mind to the same degree that the distribution of the Good extends further than the distribution of the species. The more powerful each thing is, the more far-reaching its activity.³⁵

Thus for Ficino 'primary matter' (*materia prima*) is formless and contains within itself the 'seeds of forms' which have the power to multiply. Although the mind is only concerned with the class of forms and not matter, matter is good because it desires form, which is higher than itself. It can receive form and thus contribute to the realization of a beautiful universe. For the same reason, the seeds of forms in matter are good because they are the 'rudiments' of the forms. Ficino then explains the function of the seeds:

all the parts of the universe contribute so harmoniously to its singular beauty that one cannot subtract or add anything. . . . But in fact, because all the parts of the universe, which have issued from fixed seeds and are endowed with distinct shapes, attain beautifully and easily, by a direct path, and in a fitting time and order, the aims which have been allotted to them, the result is that they are all moved in the same manner as what is moved by the skill and counsel of man.³⁶

We may therefore understand that specific seeds bring into manifestation all the parts of the beautiful and harmonious universe according to laws that are already established.

In discussing the World-Soul, Ficino returns to this problem. For him, generation is the principle of nutrition and growth. No being can be nourished or grow without the generation of certain parts. He tries to establish the idea that where nourishment and growth follow generation, there is life and a soul. Speaking of the existence of the soul in earth and in water, he introduces the concept of seeds:

We see the earth begetting a multitude of trees and animals, thanks to specific seeds, nourishing them and making them grow. We see

³⁵ 'Quoniam vero ultra formarum ordinem est prima illa informis rerum materia, in qua latent quaedam, ut ita loquar, formarum pullulantium semina, mentis munus quod terminatur formis, haec informia non complectitur. Ipsa tamen materia bona est quodammodo, quia boni, id est formae appetens, quia ab bonum suscipiendum exposita, quia bono necessaria mundo. Semina quoque sunt bona, quia sunt formarum bonarum inchoationes. Tanto saltem intervallo bonitas mentem superat quanto longius boni quam speciei tendit largitio. Quo enim res quaeque potentior est eo longius operatur.' *Theologia Platonica*, I.6 (ed. Marcel, I, p. 71). I also used a typescript kindly supplied by Prof. Allen prior to the publication of Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology, Volume I, Books I-IV*, English translation by M. J. B. Allen with J. Warden, Latin text edited by J. Hankins with W. Bowen, Cambridge, Mass., 2001; this passage on pp. 86-87.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, II.13 (ed. Marcel, I, p. 123).

earth making even stones grow, like teeth . . . as long as they cling to their roots, whereas if they are pulled up or pulled out, they do not grow any more. Could one say that the bosom of this female being lacks life, she who spontaneously brings forth and sustains so many shoots . . . ? Similarly with the body of water. Water and earth therefore have a soul, unless we dare claim that these living beings, which we say are produced by the soul of earth or water because they seem to lack individual seeds, are not born of such a soul but of the influx of celestial souls.³⁷

From this Ficino allows growth of stones like that of plants and animals. However, he finds no visible seeds to compare with those of plants or animals. Yet we must not think that specific beings are born only from definite seeds nor that a distant and universal cause is alone enough. Ficino proposes a different idea:

All these points signify that present everywhere through earth and water in an artful and vital nature are the spiritual and life-giving seeds of everything. These seeds can generate of themselves wherever corporeal seeds are missing; they can nourish seeds that have been left behind by animals; and from one withered grape pip, whose nature is single and lowly, they can bring forth the vine in all its variety, order, and value to man, that is to say, with its varied, rational and valuable powers. The same vital nature draws out from the depths of matter, where corporeal substances do not penetrate, the substantial forms of the elements. Moreover, it takes the elemental qualities, which of themselves can only burn and freeze and so on, and adds to them the precious variety of colours and shapes and the vigour of life.³⁸

We see that it is the 'life-giving and spiritual seeds of all things' (*omnium semina vivifica et spiritualia*), probably invisible, that make good the lack among the corporeal seeds. For Ficino, they nourish and foster the seeds that have been abandoned. They possess various rational powers that give birth to a multitude of varied, well-ordered and valued individuals. Nature, ever industrious and full of vitality,

³⁷ *Ibid.*, IV.1 (ed. Marcel, I, p. 144).

³⁸ 'Haec omnia significant adesse ubique per terram et aquam in natura quadam artificiosa vitalique spiritualia et vivifica semina omnium, quae ipsa per se gignant ubicumque semina corporalia desunt, semina rursus derelicta ab animalibus fovcant, atque ex putrido vinaceo semine, cuius et una et vilis natura est, variam ordinatam pretiosamque generent vitem, viribus videlicet suis variis, rationalibus, pretiosis. Eadem natura vitalis substantiales elementorum formas e fundo materiae ipsius educit, quo non penetrant substantiae corporales; elementales insuper qualitates, quae per se urerent solum frigefacerentque et similia, ad colorum figurarumque speciosissimam ducit varietatem vitaeque vigorem.' *Ibid.* (ed. Marcel, I, pp. 147-48).

encloses these invisible seeds which have the power to extract 'substantial forms' of the elements from the depths of matter. By this process, Ficino links the Thomist doctrine of 'substantial form' to his theory of seeds. We notice that these seeds are superior to the elemental forms of things. They arrange things in such a way as to utilize Aristotle's qualities of the elements to bring about properties such as colour and shape. Ficino's seeds are thus able to make Aristotelian physics subordinate. These spiritual seeds are also found within the corporeal ones.³⁹

Further on, in a section of recapitulation, Ficino deploys a remarkable argument on the relationship between seeds and nature. He says that the seed of a living being has within itself the reason-principles of the being and as a consequence, that being is then brought forth 'rationally'. Within the corporeal seed, which is uniform and almost formless, these rational principles are only found 'in potential'. Even if we make a division of the corporeal seed of a living being, each portion will carry the whole fruit:

This shows that the 'seminal force' (*vim seminariam*) latent within the seed and within which resides the principle of this movement and generation is in a way incorporeal. But the 'seminal power' (*virtus seminaria*) that we call 'nature' must hold within itself multiple reasons of a living being. For the same, in so far as it is the same, cannot engender directly such great diversity . . . But are the 'seminal forces' (*vires seminariae*) the principal and causative factors in the seeds of living beings? Not at all. Indeed, it is not a species that comes forth from one of these 'seminal powers' but rather an individual of the species, and each of them draws its origin from something else in the same species. We must therefore go back to Universal Nature which includes the universal reasons of all species. Yes, to Nature, mother of all that exists on the earth, especially as corporeal seeds are often wanting for plants and animals that appear here and there spontaneously. Their production therefore requires incorporeal seeds.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Ibid.*, VI.10 (ed. Marcel, I, p. 249). For the connection of the concept of seeds with the Thomist doctrine of 'substantial forms' in Ficino, see below.

⁴⁰ 'Hinc patet vim seminariam in semine ipso latentem esse quodammodo incorpoream in qua sit huius motus generationisque principium. Oportet autem multiplicis animantis rationes multiplices seminariae inesse virtuti quam vocamus naturam. Idem enim, prout idem est, diversitatem tantam proxime generare non posset. . . . Sed numquid seminariae vires in seminibus animantium summae causae sunt? Nequaquam. Non enim ab ulla illarum fit species ipsa, sed quiddam potius particulare sub specie, et quaelibet illarum ab alio sub eadem specie ducit originem. Ideo ad universalem naturam confugiendum est, in qua universales sint suarum

For Ficino, the 'seminal power', identified with nature that contains within herself the reason-principles of what will be born, is only the formative principle of the individual, not of the species. All the species and their entire reasons need a more universal source. This is 'Universal Nature'. Ficino says that the natures of the four elements are related directly to the nature of the moon which contains the reasons of all the elements. The nature of the moon is related to that of the sphere above, and so on, so that all particular natures are related to Universal Nature. This latter contains the reasons of all natural things, as well as those of the particular natures. These reasons are the 'exemplary' and the efficient causes. And they make Universal Nature direct and lead all the particular natures to the goals determined by fixed laws.⁴¹ What is important here is that Ficino identifies nature with the 'seminal power'. It is incorporeal, often enclosed within the corporeal seed, and contains the principle of movement and generation. And the total sum of these 'seminal powers', which are the particular natures, is Universal Mother Nature. We may note that the relationship between the particular natures and Universal Nature perhaps parallels the connection that exists between individual souls and the World-Soul.

Finally, Ficino reaches his own synthesis, as follows: The highest and most fecund divine life generates as her 'lineage' (called by Orpheus *Pallas*) this whole machine of the world, before giving birth to it externally. This 'lineage', necessarily very close to God, is the 'universal seed of the world' (*universale semen mundi*) and contains the particular seeds of all the parts to be begotten externally within this world. These seeds harmonize with one another through their essence so that God is simple, and they differ from each other through their reason-principles so that the diversity of individuals may be realized in the world.⁴² Thus we observe that the Son of God is conceived here as the 'universal seed of the world'.

specierum omnium rationes. Ad naturam, inquam, terrae terrenorum procreatricem, praesertim cum saepe plantis et animalibus passim sponte nascentibus semina corporalia desint, quo fit ut ad eorum productionem seminibus incorporeis opus sit.' *Ibid.*, XI.4 (ed. Marcel, II, p. 117).

⁴¹ *Ibid.* (ed. Marcel, II, p. 117).

⁴² *Ibid.* (ed. Marcel, II, pp. 119–20).

5. *The De vita coelitus comparanda*

If Ficino exercised a great influence on humanists through his commentaries on the dialogues of Plato and through his *Platonic Theology*, physicians, as natural philosophers, were doubtless more interested in his work on longevity entitled *De vita libri tres* (Florence, 1489).⁴³ References to Neoplatonic natural magic are mainly concentrated in the third book, *De vita coelitus comparanda*, a treatise originally intended as a commentary on Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.3.11. As Copenhaver has shown, Ficino modified the ideas of Plotinus by following the later Neoplatonists.⁴⁴ For him, the magus, having acquired these teachings, can manipulate material objects to draw down higher immaterial forces through which he is united with the World-Soul and its *logoi*. In this work, he explicitly advances the notion of the seminal principle, in the form of 'seminal reasons' (*rationes seminales*).

Ficino first explains what is, to Plotinus, the power which attracts the favour of the heavens, and how to win with ease the powers of the soul of the world, the stars and the *daemones* by way of objects of suitable form. According to him, the soul, the principle of movement, is the prime mover and moves of itself. If it is introduced between the body and the mind, which do not have movement of themselves, mutual attraction is established between them. The divine and omnipresent World-Soul is the intermediary of all natural things. It contains within itself all the things to which it is united. Ficino goes on to explain why one must use such things to attract heavenly power through the seminal reasons, arguing that the seminal

⁴³ On the *De vita*, see the introduction to Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed. and tr. by C. V. Kaske and J. R. Clark, Binghamton, NY, 1989, pp. 1–90. See also D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, London, 1958; repr. Notre Dame, Ind., 1975, Stroud, Glos., 2000; F. A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno*; G. Zanier, *La medicina astrologica e la sua teoria: Marsilio Ficino e i suoi critici contemporanei*, Rome, 1977; Müller-Jahncke, *Astrologische-magische Theorie*, pp. 33–56; P. Zambelli, *L'ambigua natura della magia: filosofi, streghe, riti nel Rinascimento*, Milan, 1991.

⁴⁴ B. P. Copenhaver, 'Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in the *De Vita* of Marsilio Ficino', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 37 (1984), pp. 523–54; idem, 'Renaissance Magic and Neoplatonic Philosophy: *Ennead* 4, 3–5 in Ficino's *De vita coelitus comparanda*', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, II, pp. 351–69; idem, 'Iamblichus, Synesius and the Chaldaean Oracles in Marsilio Ficino's *De Vita Libri Tres*: Hermetic Magic or Neoplatonic Magic?', in *Supplementum Festivum*, pp. 441–55; idem, 'Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus and the Question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance', in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*, ed. by I. Merkel and A. G. Debus, Washington, DC, and London, 1988, pp. 79–110. See also the introduction to Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, and M. J. B. Allen, *Icastes*, chs 3 and 5.

reasons through the heavenly constellations give form to species and individuals and impress on them their characters:

In addition, the World-Soul possesses by divine power precisely as many seminal reasons of things as there are Ideas in the divine Mind. By these seminal reasons she fashions the same number of species in matter. That is why every single species corresponds through its own seminal reason to its own Idea and through this reason it can often easily receive something from the Idea—since indeed it was made through the reason from the Idea. This is why, if at any time the species degenerates from its proper form, it can be formed again with the reason as the proximate intermediary and, through the Idea as intermediary, can then be easily re-formed.⁴⁵

According to Ficino, when a magus suitably applies to an individual many things, dispersed in the world but conforming to the same Idea, he can easily draw down a gift from the Idea through the seminal reasons. However, he does not attract divinities wholly separated from matter but attracts gifts derived from the World-Soul or the stars.⁴⁶ Each species of natural objects corresponds to its reason-principle derived from the World-Soul. The magus must also know the right moment for this operation because the World-Soul grants its gifts to a particular species at a specific time. He then receives not only the influence of the rays of the star and the demon but also that of the World-Soul. For the reason-principle of any star or demon flourishes in the World-Soul, by way of a seminal reason for it to generate and by way of an exemplary reason for it to know.⁴⁷ Indeed these reason-principles construct celestial figures and constellations, and impress properties on them. The stars contain all the species of sublunary things and their properties. The forms of things on earth depend in this way on the forms of the stars.⁴⁸

Ficino then explains the relationship between the heavenly constellations and the seminal reasons in forming sublunary things. For

⁴⁵ 'Accedit ad haec quod anima mundi totidem saltem rationes rerum seminales divinitus habet, quot ideae sunt in mente divina, quibus ipsa rationibus totidem fabricat species in materia. Unde unaquaeque species per propriam rationem seminalem propriae respondet ideae, facileque potest per hanc saepe aliquid illinc accipere, quandoquidem per hanc illinc est effecta. Ideoque si quando a propria forma degeneret, potest hoc medio sibi proximo formari rursus perque id medium inde facile reformari.' *De vita*, III.1 (ed. Kaske & Clark, p. 243; *Opera omnia*, p. 531).

⁴⁶ Ibid. (ed. Kaske & Clark, pp. 242–45; *Opera omnia*, p. 531).

⁴⁷ Ibid. (ed. Kaske & Clark, p. 245 and p. 430, n. 7; *Opera omnia*, p. 531).

⁴⁸ Ibid. (ed. Kaske & Clark, p. 245; *Opera omnia*, pp. 531–32).

him, the World-Soul generates their forms and specific powers by the appropriate reason-principles with the help of the stars and the celestial forms. The properties peculiar to individuals are produced through the seminal reasons:

When, therefore, the Soul gives birth to the specific forms and the powers pertaining to the species of things below, she makes them through their respective reasons with the aid of the stars and the celestial forms. But she produces the endowments peculiar to individuals . . . likewise through the seminal reasons . . .⁴⁹

Following this, Ficino uses analogy to compare the World-Soul, which is active everywhere through the body of the world, with the centre of the macrocosm, the Sun, and the centre of the microcosm, the heart. By way of this analogy, he develops an important theory of the universal 'Spirit of the world' (*spiritus mundi*).⁵⁰ In addition he identifies it with the alchemical 'quintessence' (*quinta essentia*).⁵¹ He says that just as the power of the human body is distributed to the limbs by physiological spirits, that of the World-Soul is carried abroad by its 'quintessence' which is active everywhere in the body of the world as spirits. This 'quintessence' of the world is contained in

⁴⁹ 'Quando igitur anima gignit speciales inferiorum formas viresque, eas per rationes efficit proprias sub stellarum formarumque coelestium adminiculo. Singulares vero individuorum dotes . . . exhibet per seminales similiter rationes . . .', *ibid.* (ed. Kaske & Clark, p. 247; *Opera omnia*, p. 532).

⁵⁰ D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*; *idem*, 'The Astral Body in Renaissance Medicine', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 21 (1958), pp. 119–33; *idem*, *Music, Spirit and Language in the Renaissance*, ed. by P. Gouk, London, 1985. On the doctrine of spirit before Ficino, see G. Verbeke, *L'évolution de la doctrine du Pneuma du stoïcisme à S. Augustin*, Louvain, 1945; O. Temkin, 'On Galen's Pneumatology', *Gesnerus*, 8 (1951), pp. 80–88; A. L. Peck, 'The Connate Pneuma: An Essential Factor in Aristotle's Solutions to the Problems of Reproduction and Sensation', in *Science, Medicine and History*, ed. by E. A. Underwood, 2 vols, London, 1953, I, pp. 111–21; *Spiritus. IV^o Colloquio internazionale, Roma, 7–9 gennaio 1983*, ed. by M. Fattori and M. Bianchi, Rome, 1984; J. J. Bono, 'Medical Spirits and the Medieval Language of Life', *Traditio*, 40 (1984), pp. 91–130; G. Freudenthal, *Aristotle's Theory of Material Substance: Heat and Pneuma, Form and Soul*, Oxford, 1995.

⁵¹ See S. Matton, 'Marsile Ficino et l'alchimie, sa position, son influence', in *Alchimie et Philosophie*, ed. by J.-C. Margolin and S. Matton, Paris, 1993, pp. 123–92. On the 'fifth essence', see F. S. Taylor, 'The Idea of the Quintessence', in *Science, Medicine and History*, I, pp. 247–65; P. Moraux, 'Quinta essentia', in Pauly-Wissowa, *Realencyclopädie*, XXIV/1, Stuttgart, 1963, cols 1171–1263; R. Halleux, 'Les ouvrages alchimiques de Jean de Rupescissa', *Histoire littéraire de la France*, 41 (1981), pp. 241–77; M. Pereira, 'Quintessenza alchemica', *Kos*, 7 (1984), pp. 33–54; *Alchemie: Lexikon einer hermetischen Wissenschaft*, ed. by C. Priesner and K. Figala, Munich, 1998, pp. 300–02. S. Colnort-Bodet, *Le code alchimique dévoilé*, Paris, 1989, is insufficiently critical.

all natural things, but in varying amounts. Thus those things which contain more *spiritus* have more of the power of the World-Soul.⁵² The magus who best knows how to extract this essence from things, or to use those things which contain this essence, especially in its pure state, can draw down propitiously the heavenly gifts. This is really what Ficino's natural and astrological magic consists of. He considers that this essence is to be found in things which shine, which smell sweet or which have heat and moisture in their 'subtle substance' (e.g., gold, wine, gemstones). As food is converted to life within man by the human spirits, these things that abound in *spiritus* help to make us more akin to the *spiritus* of the world.

Ficino states that the world has life through all its parts, as is evident through the generation and movement manifested throughout. The universe is the most perfect animal.⁵³ Then he returns to the *spiritus mundi* as follows:

Therefore, between the tangible and partly transient body of the world and its very soul, whose nature is very far from its body, there exists everywhere a *spiritus*, just as there is between the soul and body in us, assuming that life everywhere is always communicated by a soul to a grosser body. For such a *spiritus* is necessarily required as a medium by which the divine Soul may both be present to the grosser body and bestow life throughout it. . . . Therefore the aid of a more excellent body—a body not a body, as it were—is needed. We know that just as all living things, plants as well as animals, live and generate through a spirit like this, so among the elements, those which are most full of *spiritus* generate very quickly and move perpetually as if alive.⁵⁴

But, he continues, 'if the elements and living beings generate something like themselves by means of their *spiritus*, why do they not generate minerals and metals, which are intermediate between the

⁵² *De vita*, III.1 (ed. Kaske & Clark, p. 247; *Opera omnia*, p. 532).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, III.2 (ed. Kaske & Clark, p. 251, and notes thereon; *Opera omnia*, p. 533). Cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 30c–31a; Plotinus, *Enneads*, II.9.5, III.2.3, IV.3.7, IV.4.32.

⁵⁴ 'Igitur inter mundi corpus tractabile et ex parte caducum atque ipsam eius animam, cuius natura nimium ab eiusmodi corpore distat, inest ubique spiritus, sicut inter animam et corpus in nobis, si modo ubique vita est communicata semper ab anima corpori crassiori. Talis namque spiritus necessario requiritur tanquam medium, quo anima divina et adsit corpori crassiori et vitam eidem penitus largiatur . . . Opus est igitur excellentioris corporis adminiculo, quasi non corporis. Proinde scimus viventia omnia, tam plantas quam animalia, per quendam spiritum huic similem vivere atque generare, atque inter elementa, quod maxime spirituale est, velocissime generare perpetuoque moveri quasi vivens.' *De vita*, III.3 (ed. Kaske & Clark, pp. 255–57; *Opera omnia*, pp. 534–35).

elements and living beings?' The answer is that the *spiritus* in minerals is confined in their body by gross matter. Ficino then connects this idea of the *spiritus mundi* extracted from natural things to the alchemical concept of 'elixir', since the *spiritus* is able to take the place of the 'seminal power' (*seminaria virtus*):

When this *spiritus* is rightly separated and, once separated, is conserved, it is able as 'seminal power' to generate a thing like itself, if only it is employed on material of the same kind. Diligent natural philosophers, when they separate this sort of *spiritus* from gold by sublimation over fire, will employ it on any of the metals and will make it gold. This *spiritus* rightly drawn from gold or something else and preserved, the Arab astrologers call 'elixir'.⁵⁵

According to Ficino, the sensible world generates all things through the *spiritus mundi* which is identified with the 'quintessence' (*quinta essentia*) and then with the 'heavens' (*coelum*). The only difference between the *spiritus mundi* and the human spirit lies in the fact that the World-Soul does not draw its *spiritus* from the four elements acting as humours, whereas our human soul does draw its spirit from the bodily humours. Ficino then reveals the origin of this *spiritus* or the manner of its birth in these terms: '[The World-Soul] procreates this *spiritus* in the first instance (to speak Platonically, or rather Plotinically) as if pregnant by her own generative power, and the stars along with it. Immediately through the *spiritus* the World-Soul gives birth to the four elements, as though everything were contained in the power of that *spiritus*.⁵⁶ Then he defines its nature: 'the *spiritus* is the most tenuous body, as if it were now soul and not body, and now body and not soul.' Its nature reflects that of the heavenly bodies. Thus it has the nature of the *aether*, the fifth element uniquely kept in the heavens by Aristotle. For Ficino, *spiritus* lives in all things as 'the proximate maker (*auctor*) of all generation and motion', being fully hot and clear, moist and life-giving by its own nature. It has acquired these gifts from the superior gifts of the World-

⁵⁵ 'Qui si quando rite secernatur secretusque conservetur, tanquam seminaria virtus poterit sibi simile generare, si modo materiae cuidam adhibeatur generis eiusdem. Qualem spiritum physici diligentes sublimatione quadam ad ignem ex auro secernentes, cuius metallorum adhibebunt aurumque efficient. Talem utique spiritum ex auro vel ex alio rite tractatum atque servatum, elixir Arabes astrologi nominant.' *Ibid.* (ed. Kaske & Clark, p. 257; *Opera omnia*, p. 535). Cf. S. Matton, 'Marsilio Ficino et l'alchimie', p. 145.

⁵⁶ *De vita*, III.3 (ed. Kaske & Clark, p. 257; *Opera omnia*, p. 535).

Soul.⁵⁷ The stars and the demons residing in this *spiritus* owe their existence to it. Further, the *spiritus* of the world may be absorbed in man by his own human spirit which is similar in nature, most notably in the case where the human spirit has been rendered more akin to it (*cognatior*) by 'art', that is to say if it attains 'the highest heavenly degree'. He who knows this art is the Ficinian magus. He can win advantages from the World-Soul, from the stars and even from the demons by contact with the *spiritus* absorbed in his body, since the stars and demons exist in it.⁵⁸

Finally, in the last chapter of the third book, Ficino sums up his discussion. Explicitly following Plotinus, he avers that the seminal reasons are within the World-Soul:

Plotinus follows him [Hermes] and thinks that everything can be easily accomplished by the intermediation of the World-Soul, since the World-Soul generates and moves the forms of natural things through certain seminal reasons divinely implanted in her. These reasons he even calls gods, since they are never cut off from the Ideas of the supreme Mind. He thinks, therefore, that through such seminal reasons the World-Soul can easily apply herself to materials since she has formed them to begin with through these same seminal reasons, when a magus or a priest brings to bear at the right time rightly grouped forms of things—forms which properly aim towards one reason or another, as the lodestone toward iron . . . Sometimes it can happen that when you bring seminal reasons to bear on forms, higher gifts too may descend, since reasons in the World-Soul are conjoined to the intellectual forms in her and through these to the Ideas of the divine Mind.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., III.4 (ed. Kaske & Clark, p. 259; *Opera omnia*, p. 536).

⁵⁹ 'Secutus hunc Plotinus putat totum id anima mundi conciliante confici posse, quatenus illa naturalium rerum formas per seminales quasdam rationes sibi divinitus insitas generat atque movet. Quas quidem rationes appellat etiam deos, quoniam ab ideis supremæ mentis numquam destituuntur. Itaque per rationes eiusmodi animam mundi facile se applicare materiis, quas formavit ab initio per easdem, quando magus vel sacerdos opportunis temporibus adhibuerit formas rerum rite collectas, quæ rationem hanc aut illam proprie spectant, sicut magnes ferrum . . . Fieri vero posse quandoque ut rationibus ad formas sic adhibitis sublimiora quoque dona descendant, quatenus rationes in anima mundi coniunctæ sunt intellectualibus eiusdem animæ formis, atque per illas divinæ mentis ideis.' Ibid., III.26 (ed. Kaske & Clark, p. 391; *Opera omnia*, pp. 571–72).

6. *The Commentary on the Enneads of Plotinus*

Having finished the entire translation of the 54 treatises of the *Enneads* of Plotinus between 1484 and January 1486, Ficino immediately began to write a commentary on the work. After a long interval, and having taken out the part which became the *De vita coelitus comparanda*, he finished the commentary in 1490, and published it with the translation of the *Enneads* in Florence in 1492. In the commentary Ficino made full application of Plotinian 'seminal principles' (*logoi spermatikoi*) to his cosmology. Unfortunately there are few studies of this field on which to base our discussion. Moreover, the vast scale of the work and the lack of a critical edition render the task all the more difficult.⁶⁰ In these circumstances we shall limit ourselves to focusing briefly on some important features in Ficino's development of the concept of seeds.

According to Ficino, Plotinus shows that all things generated and moved by nature are directed by the 'seminal reasons' of Universal Nature, and notably more by the particular reasons and seeds than by the less differentiated reason-principles themselves. Ficino asserts, by analogy with the animal world, that all the bodies produced in the world are formed by the *spiritus* as well as by the seminal reasons in the vegetative power of the World-Soul. Before the forms of things exist in the world, they must be born from this generative power acting through the seminal reasons. By these reason-principles, the Soul forms things 'naturally', that is to say, 'the Soul produces the seminal reasons in nature and through these reasons nature reproduces the forms in matter'.⁶¹ The seminal reasons by their inexhaustible potency multiply the seeds of nature and then natural things. He also adds that the irrational part of the World-Soul holds the seeds as if they were the last traces of Ideas. And the 'seminal reason of the world' (*ratio seminaria mundi*) is itself, so to speak, the 'Word'

⁶⁰ See however M. Heitzman, 'La libertà e il fato nella filosofia di Marsilio Ficino', *Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica*, 28 (1936), pp. 350-71, and 29 (1937), pp. 59-82; A. M. Wolters, 'The First Draft of Ficino's Translation of Plotinus', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, I, pp. 305-29; M. J. B. Allen, 'Summoning Plotinus: Ficino, Smoke, and the Strangled Chickens', in *Reconsidering the Renaissance*, ed. by M. Di Cesare, Binghamton, NY, 1992, pp. 63-88 (reprinted in *Plato's Third Eye*); H. D. Saffrey, 'Florence, 1492: The Reappearance of Plotinus', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 49 (1996), pp. 488-508.

⁶¹ *In Plotini librum De coelo*, ch. 17, *Opera omnia*, p. 1640.

of the divine Mind through which matter receives its worldly embellishment.⁶² We note here that the seeds are made by the seminal reasons and are therefore not ontologically identical with the seminal reasons.

For Ficino, since a whole animal, composed of diverse parts, multiplies from a tiny seed, the seminal reason in this seed does not lack strength. The seminal reason can remain in any portion of the bodily seed since it is free from matter and therefore from spatial dimension. This divine reason-principle, that brings everything forth, lacks nothing, for nature pervades and moves all.⁶³ With regard to the seminal reason, Ficino puts forward four major features: 1) seminal reason is the efficient 'principle' of all things that are brought forth; 2) it includes in itself all these things; 3) all natural things that are born through seminal reason are made in the manner of a seal, according to their own efficient and exemplary power; 4) the entire arrangement and variability of things is prescribed within the seminal reason which expresses them outwardly as they have been imprinted inwardly, so that nothing escapes divine providence.⁶⁴ At the heart of these arguments we note that there is an underlying analogy between the concept of seminal reasons and that of the vegetable kingdom:

this reason seems to spread just like the root of a plant, which propagates itself into stem, branches and so on. . . . Thus one sees that the 'seminal reason of the world' . . . diffuses itself through different things, even through opposites, under the very Idea of diversity.⁶⁵

Universal Nature contains within herself more seeds of things than Mind contains Ideas. The power of a seed is weak. One seed cannot contain, nor accomplish, what one Idea can have and do. Therefore the power of a single Idea is distributed among many seeds to compensate for their weakness by numbers. And matter is made into many forms under one seed.⁶⁶ Even if visible corporeal

⁶² *In Plotini librum De providentia*, ch. 2, *Opera omnia*, p. 1687.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, ch. 3, *Opera omnia*, p. 1688.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. 15, *Opera omnia*, p. 1695.

⁶⁵ 'videtur haec ipsa ratio non aliter propagare seipsam, quam plantae radix in stipitem atque ramos & reliqua . . . Atque ita ratio seminaria mundi, vita quidem, sed divinatorum universaliumque ultima, videtur sub ipsa videlicet diversitatis idea seipsam in se per diversa articulatum contrariaque diffundere.' *Ibid.*, ch. 16, *Opera omnia*, p. 1697.

⁶⁶ 'Natura plura continet in se rerum semina quam mens ideas. Quum enim naturae

seeds are not found everywhere throughout the mass of the world, there are assuredly innumerable invisible seeds and seminal reasons which are manifest to the senses through their operations. And nature has no choice but to make the forms determined by the seminal reasons. By these, acting as principles and rules, nature has complete determination over motion. The qualities springing up are naturally gathered into a confined space, and are led to a single production by balanced moderation. This production is multiform but respects uniform harmonious order.⁶⁷

Nature gives birth to living beings without visible seeds but with seminal reasons, and procreates the qualities of the elements through incorporeal seeds without the help of the elements. Whatever its power is, the seminal reason possesses it from the beginning. The reason 'does not know what it is making' but produces it without knowing.⁶⁸ The world multiplies through the 'seminal power' of the World-Soul, just as any living being does from its own seed, which possesses such a power. The World-Soul acts with supreme power to the extent that its intellect forms its reason-principle and hence its nature. The reason-principle, which naturally runs in different directions, is made pregnant with the seeds of everything. Thus the rational form of the world is born from an intimate rational motion through the seminal reasons of things.⁶⁹

7. *The sources for his concept of seeds*

We hope to have shown the principal features of the Florentine metaphysician's concept of seeds. On the one hand, he faithfully followed Plotinian doctrine of the *logoi spermatikoi* using the term 'rationes seminales', notably in the *De vita coelitus comparanda* and the commentary on Plotinus, that is, in his mature thought. He discovered the theory of *logoi spermatikoi* in Plotinus and united it with Thomas

seminisque virtus sit debilior, non potest in uno semine comprehendere, perque unum facere quaecumque idea possidet potestque una. Ergo per plura semina distribuitur ideae unice vigor virtutisque debilitas numero compensatur. Eadem ratione materia in plures perducitur sub unoquoque semine formas.' *Ibid.*, ch. 17, *Opera omnia*, p. 1697.

⁶⁷ *In Plotini librum De natura et contemplatione et uno, Opera omnia*, p. 1723.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, *Opera omnia*, p. 1724.

⁶⁹ *In Plotini librum primum De dubiis animae, Opera omnia*, p. 1737.

Aquinas's doctrine of 'substantial form'.⁷⁰ For this reason, we can perhaps say that the Ficinian system subordinated Peripatetic physics (or hylomorphism) to Neoplatonic metaphysics. On the other hand, at the beginning of his career, Ficino already broached the concept of seeds in identifying nature with the 'seminal power' that germinates and generates. The total sum of particular natures is for him Universal Mother Nature, the 'seminary of the world', or the 'World-Seedbed'. It seems then that these two conceptions are not completely identical, although they are used in a way that is sometimes very close.⁷¹ In any event, we can say that in the universe of Ficino there are, below the seminal reasons of the World-Soul, the multiple seeds of Universal Nature which determine the destiny of each being. What are the possible sources for his notion of seeds?

Ficino doubtless drew the notion of seeds principally from Neoplatonic writings. It is natural to suppose that he found the key in his chief guides to Platonism, Plotinus and Proclus.⁷² Besides the Neoplatonists, can we find any indication in the dialogues of Plato himself? Plato speaks of seeds in the *Timaeus*, probably under Pythagorean influence. The subjects are the seed of the Athenian people (23c), the oracle of God the Sower (41c-d), the seed which is identified with the element of fire (56b), and is in the *panspermia* made from primary triangles and identified with human marrow (73c).⁷³ Against such Presocratic notions, Aristotle set out refutations in his *Metaphysics* which is likewise a rich source for Presocratic concepts of cosmogonic seed.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ See B. P. Copenhaver, 'Renaissance Magic and Neoplatonic Philosophy', esp. pp. 355 and 368-69.

⁷¹ M. J. B. Allen remarks that, in his commentary on Plato's *Second Letter*, Ficino would later reduce the number of orders of divine species from four to three: forms, reasons and Ideas, which relate to matter, the soul and the divine Mind respectively. By this, Ficino links, but does not identify, forms with seeds, and he distinguishes seminal reasons from higher reasons. Therefore forms, seeds and seminal reasons return to the World-Soul, while higher reasons go to the divine Mind, and the Ideas to the One. The hypostasis of 'nature' is suppressed. See Allen, 'Marsilio Ficino on Plato', pp. 573-74.

⁷² See Plotinus, *Enneads*, III.1.7, III.2.2, III.7.11, IV.3.10, IV.4.29 and 39, V.1.5, V.3.8, V.7.3, V.9.6, VI.3.16, VI.7.5; Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus*, I.51.31, I.99.17, I.143.18 and 30, I.300.13, I.430.5-8, I.449.14, II.66.20; II.73.17-18, II.131.22, II.146.5, II.193.27, III.188.7-9, III.191.7, III.192.22, III.233.4-25, III.248.10, III.296.12.

⁷³ He had no further recourse to Chalcidius on this subject, despite the latter's use of seeds.

⁷⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.3.983b, VIII.4.1043a, XII.8.1072b, XIV.3.1091a, XIV.5.1092a.

Now Ficino established his version of the chain of ancient theologians based on the belief that a single truth was transmitted from the time of Moses and Hermes-Mercury Trismegistus until the time of Plato, and was finally revealed by Jesus Christ. This late Hellenistic vision, elaborated in the Renaissance, has been studied particularly by D. P. Walker.⁷⁵ This is the 'ancient theology' (*prisca theologia*). Among the ancient theologians, Ficino venerated especially Zoroaster, Hermes, Orpheus, Pythagoras and Plato. Even if the Chaldean Oracles wrongly attributed to Zoroaster do not speak of seeds,⁷⁶ we can find an allusion to the seeds that Nature guards within herself in the Orphic Hymn to Nature (*Physis*).⁷⁷ As for the *Corpus Hermeticum*, while it is true that in 1463 Ficino himself translated, prior to the dialogues of Plato, the first fourteen *logoi* in which the image of a 'Creator Sower' is put forward, possibly under the influence of Stoicism,⁷⁸ nevertheless we scarcely see him calling on this mythical personage in support of his concept.

As far as the Stoic doctrine of *logoi spermatikoi* is concerned, he could have used important texts in Diogenes Laertius, Plutarch,

⁷⁵ See D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, London, 1972. See also C. B. Schmitt, 'Perennial Philosophy from Agostino Steuco to Leibniz', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 27 (1966), pp. 505–32; M. J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art*, pp. 1–49; W. Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia perennis: Historische Umrisse abendländischer Spiritualität in Antike, Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, Frankfurt a. M., 1998.

⁷⁶ See J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les Magés hellénisés: Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspe d'après la tradition grecque*, 2 vols, Paris, 1938; repr. New York, 1975; H. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*, rev. edn, Paris, 1978, pp. 340–44. On the Chaldean Oracles in the Renaissance, see K. H. Dannenfeldt, 'The Pseudo-Zoroastrian Oracles in the Renaissance', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 4 (1957), pp. 7–30; I. Klutstein, 'Marsile Ficin et les Oracles chaldaïques', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, I, pp. 331–38; eadem, *Marsilio Ficino et la théologie ancienne: Oracles chaldaïques, Hymnes orphiques, Hymnes de Proclus*, Florence, 1987; and B. Tambrun, 'Marsile Ficin et le Commentaire de Pléthon sur les Oracles chaldaïques', *Accademia. Revue de la Société Marsile Ficin*, 1 (1999), pp. 9–48.

⁷⁷ *The Orphic Hymns*, ed. and tr. by A. Athanassakis, Missoula, Mont., 1977, p. 16. The Ficinian version of this hymn is contained in a letter published by P. O. Kristeller, 'The Scholastic Background of Marsilio Ficino with an Edition of Unpublished Texts', *Traditio*, 2 (1944), pp. 257–318, esp. pp. 317–18. But Ficino did not emphasize the passage in question. However, the anonymous translation falsely attributed to him reads: 'Omnium tu pater, mater, nutrix et alumna | Celeripara, beata, multi seminis, horaria, impetuosa . . .', in I. Klutstein, *Marsilio Ficino et la théologie ancienne*, p. 66 (IX.19). On Orpheus in Ficino, see J. Warden, 'Orpheus and Ficino', in *Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth*, ed. by J. Warden, London, 1982, pp. 85–110; D. P. Walker, 'Orpheus the Theologian', in his *Ancient Theology*, pp. 22–41.

⁷⁸ *Corpus Hermeticum*, III.3, VIII.3, IX.3–6, X.3, XIII.2, XIV.10.

Seneca, Cicero and others. However, it is difficult for us to find clear evidence of Stoic involvement, except what was conveyed through the Neoplatonic texts. We can nevertheless add to this list the cosmogonic passage in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, I.5–9, and those lines of poetry so influential in Neoplatonic circles in late antiquity, Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI.724–31. As regards the Fathers of the Church, we know that St Augustine was one of Ficino's favourite authors. He made significant use of his *De civitate Dei* which includes two passages on the doctrine of seminal reasons, but he seems not to have used the more important *De Genesi ad litteram* for his concept of seeds.⁷⁹ In the Latin *Picatrix*, a magic treatise of Arabic origin and one of the sources of Ficino's theory of *spiritus mundi*, I have not been able to find any special mention of seeds which would cast light on the problem.⁸⁰

These texts are possible sources for Ficino's concept of seeds. Yet we do not have any decisive evidence. In these circumstances his commentary on Plato's *Philebus* may be viewed in a rather special light.⁸¹ Conceived as a dialogue on the theme of the Good, the highest principle in Plotinus, the *Philebus* was very important for the Neoplatonists, as also for Ficino. This commentary seems to have been composed earlier in his career, between July and the winter of 1469, that is, between the commentary on Plato's *Symposium* and the *Platonic Theology*. As in other writings, Ficino speaks of the seeds of nature on several occasions. To avoid repetition we shall not reproduce them all here.⁸² But we find a remarkable passage at the beginning of the commentary, on the need for finality in natural change. He says,

⁷⁹ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XII.26 and XXII.14. See my article: 'Les logoi spermaticoi et le concept de semence dans la minéralogie de Paracelse', forthcoming in *Revue d'histoire des sciences*. A. Tarabochia Canavero, 'S. Agostino nella Teologia Platonica di Marsilio Ficino', *Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica*, 70 (1978), pp. 626–46, says that Ficino used the *De Genesi ad litteram* for his concept of 'seminal reasons', but her discussion on this point seems to me unsatisfactory.

⁸⁰ There is a good critical edition of this text by D. Pingree, *Picatrix: The Latin Version of the 'Ghâyat Al-Hakîm'*, London, 1986. See also V. Perrone Compagni, 'Picatrix latinus: Concezioni filosofico-religiose e prassi magica', *Rivista di storia della filosofia medievale*, 1 (1975), pp. 237–337; E. Garin, *Ermetismo del Rinascimento*, Rome, 1988, passim; Zambelli, *L'ambigua natura della magia*, passim.

⁸¹ See Marsilio Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. and tr. by M. J. B. Allen, Berkeley etc., 1975; repr. Tempe, Ariz., 2000.

⁸² The principal ideas on 'seeds' are: the truth of the divine Mind and the correspondence with the seeds of things in its essence, I.15 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1221; Allen, p. 169); in the Mind, the creator of all things, reside the species, seeds, powers,

Again, the body's power either produces something by chance or by a necessary intention of the nature. It is not by chance, because any one body would produce all possible effects and so anything would result from anything. Things would not need a definite seed and the argument [discussed] by Lucretius would come to pass: 'If things were made from nothing, every genus could be born from every thing; nothing would need a seed. First, men could arise from the sea and the genus of fishes from the land and birds could burst from the sky'. And surely what happens by chance rarely happens, and it happens not just in one way but in various ways. But we see certain appropriate effects coming from individual things—from a particular seed, at the established time, in the usual order and way, in a set sequence, with the same middle terms and the same rational principle and most of the time. So, as the corporeal power produces the effect from a necessary intention of the nature, it intends the effect in the proper way and what it intends it desires by natural instinct.⁸³

Clearly Ficino is involving the Lucretian idea of 'the seeds of things' (*semina rerum*) in his conception of the seeds of nature. Lucretius himself elaborated this theory within an atomist tradition that we can reconstruct from the surviving fragments of Democritus and Epicurus.⁸⁴

reasons and Ideas of all its works, I.17 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1223; Allen, p. 181); the seeds of forms are present in nature and the reasons of all the seeds of nature are in essence, I.18 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1224; Allen, p. 187); the Idea in nature is like the seedbed in matter, I.20 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1226; Allen, p. 203); God determines matter through form, nature through seeds, the soul through reasons, the Mind through Ideas, I.36 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1250; Allen, p. 363); the Mind effects creation with matter through the Ideas while the soul achieves generation with matter through seeds and reasons, II.4 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1257; Allen, p. 417).

⁸³ 'Item corporis vis aut casu in opus incidit aut necessaria quadam intentione naturae. Non casu, quia in quaecumque opera quodcumque corpus incurreret, atque ita quaelibet a quibuslibet fierent, neque certo res semine indigerent et illud Lucretii eveniret. Nam si de nihilo fierent ex omnibus rebus omne genus nasci posset; nihil semine egeret, e mari primum homines, e terra possit oriri squamigerum genus et volucres erumpere coelo. Et profecto quod casu fit raro contingit, nec uno dumtaxat modo sed variis provenit. Videmus autem propria quaedam a singulis, certo semine, instituto tempore, solito ordine modoque, digesta serie, iisdem mediis, eadem ratione et ut plurimum fieri. Ergo cum necessaria quadam intentione naturae corporea vis effectum producat, proprie illum intendit et quod intendit naturali instinctu appetit.' *Commentaria in Philebum*, I.1 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1207; Allen, pp. 75 and 77). Cf. Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, I.159–63.

⁸⁴ For Leucippus and Democritus, nature is, so to speak, the 'universal seedbed' (*panspermia*), Aristotle, *De caelo*, III.4.303a, Leucippus, A15. The *panspermia* makes all the elements of nature from atoms, Aristotle *De anima*, I.2.404a, Leucippus A28. On Epicurus and Lucretius, see F. Solmsen, 'Epicurus and Cosmological Heresies', *American Journal of Philology*, 72 (1951), pp. 1–23, esp. pp. 20–23; P. H. Schrijvers, 'Le regard sur l'invisible: Etude sur l'emploi de l'analogie dans l'œuvre de Lucrèce',

The influence of Lucretius on Ficino has hitherto been mentioned in connection with his youth,⁸⁵ but this other avenue has not been seriously explored, and our observations on the importance of Lucretius in the genesis of Ficino's ideas on the seeds of nature are only a first step. Future research will surely disclose other elements in this fundamental dimension of his thought. In any event, we can conclude that the concept of seeds in Ficino is an original synthesis of quite heterogeneous ideas from antiquity.

in *Lucrece*, ed. by O. Gigon, Geneva, 1978, pp. 77–114; V. Nutton, 'The Seeds of Disease: An Explanation of Contagion and Infection from the Greeks to the Renaissance', *Medical History*, 27 (1983), pp. 1–34.

⁸⁵ See Marcel, *Marsile Ficin* (as n. 1 above), pp. 223–28. See also P. O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2 vols, Florence, 1937; repr. Florence, 1973, I, p. clxiii; idem, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, p. 24, n. 22; idem, *Le Thomisme et la pensée italienne de la Renaissance*, Montreal and Paris, 1967, p. 118. A study of the influence of Lucretius on Ficino is a desideratum.

NARCISSUS, DIVINE GAZES AND BLOODY MIRRORS: THE CONCEPT OF MATTER IN FICINO¹

Sergius Kodera

Ad lucernae lumen ne te contempleris.

Look not in a mirror by lamplight.

Pythagorean precept

In this paper, I want to combine two related interests of mine, an interest in gendered metaphors and in their use to describe the material aspect of the world, that is to say, how an ostensibly abstract philosophical discourse on the order of the world relates to ideas about the relationship between actual men and women in the early modern period. In that context, I also want to investigate the metaphor of the mirror, which is of crucial importance in a male discourse, the philosophy of Marsilio Ficino. In his Neoplatonic philosophy, the mirror becomes, I argue, the most important and highly ambiguous metaphor for the embodied world, and hence for the female and passive aspect of creation. I shall argue that it eventually becomes the crucial image of a particularly male fantasy of women. I shall focus on the fact that Ficino's philosophy centres around a fundamentally solipsistic vision of creation and creativity, in which the material world, by being tied to the ambiguous metaphor of the mirror, becomes associated with a particular and paradoxical condition of disembodied embodiment and consequently associated with the demonic. The myth of Narcissus has deep correspondences with this view.

¹ The material presented here summarizes part of the research I carried out during my stay at the Warburg Institute in London in 1997 and 1998, which was made possible by a Frances Yates Fellowship and an Erwin Schrodinger postdoctoral grant from the Austrian Federal Government; I wish to thank both institutions for their generous support. Intellectually this essay is most indebted to Michael Allen's 1989 edition and commentary on Ficino's *Sophist* commentary as well as to Frontisi-Ducroux's 1997 study on the role of mirrors in ancient Greece and Rome. I wish to thank Valery Rees, Michael Allen, Georges Didi-Huberman and Tanya Pollard for their comments, corrections and draft-reading. In some aspects, the present paper continues the topics of a paper I published in 1999: 'The Stuff Dreams are Made of: Ficino's Magic Mirrors', *Accademia. Revue de la Société Marsile Ficin*, 1 (1999), pp. 85–100, hence some of the material presented here overlaps with that publication.

To write about the concept of matter and its relationship to gendered ideas in a Renaissance Platonist may perhaps seem at first strange, since Ficino is mainly renowned as a 'doctor of souls', and promulgator of intricate metaphysics as expressed in the system of hypostases of Plotinus, Proclus and other Neoplatonists.² Matter, being 'the shadow of a shadow', a 'corpse adorned', 'evil itself', to quote Plotinus, is either not mentioned at all in such Neoplatonic hierarchies or else it unmistakably occupies the lowest place on the scale of being.³ And indeed, neither matter nor women are prominent topics in Ficino's writings. Nevertheless, Ficino's cosmology as well as his metaphysics refer implicitly (and hence perhaps even more decisively for this philosophy) to a gendered substructure: the partition of creation into male and female aspects. This becomes especially obvious with Ficino's ideas about matter, which he inherits and transforms from a complex amalgamation of divergent classical traditions. During the past decades, scholars like Evelyn Fox-Keller have sought to make this gendered and highly metaphorical discourse explicit; a mode of thinking which pervades even modern science to an amazing degree:

gender and norms come to be seen as silent organisers of the mental and discursive maps of the social and natural worlds we simultaneously inhabit and construct even in those worlds that women never enter. I call this the symbolic work of gender; it remains silent precisely to the extent that norms associated with masculine culture are taken as universal.⁴

Ficino's elusiveness on the topic of matter is also due to the fact that the position of matter in Platonic philosophy in general is by

² 'Indeed, the whole philosophy of Plotinus, the founder of Neo-Platonism, is a consequence of his dividing reality into a hierarchical series of ontological states where the higher subsumes the lower and the lower emanates from the higher and ultimately prime hypostasis, the transcendent One', Michael J. B. Allen, 'Ficino's Theory of the Five Substances and the Neoplatonists' *Parmenides*', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 12 (1982), p. 19. For a clear exposition of the hierarchy of being by Ficino himself, see for instance, Marsilio Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. and tr. by M. J. B. Allen, Berkeley etc., 1975; repr. Tempe, Ariz., 2000, pp. 88–102 (ch. 4). Relevant passages from Plato are *Laus* X, 892A; 896A–898B; *Parmenides* 137C–142D and 159B–160B. For a detailed exposition of Plotinus's system of hypostases, see, for example, A. H. Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus*, Cambridge, 1940.

³ Cf. Denis O'Brien, 'Plotinus on Matter and Evil,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. by Lloyd P. Gerson, Cambridge, 1996, p. 182 ff., with references.

⁴ Evelyn Fox-Keller, *Secrets of Life, Secrets of Death*, New York, 1993, p. 16 ff.

no means clear. Is matter, God's first creation, essentially good or is matter the filth at the bottom of the universe which distracts the soul by dragging it into the mud of the corporeal world? In the *Timaeus*, Plato presents an essentially optimistic outlook on the corporeal world whereas the *Phaedo* (69c; 83d) emphasizes its negative effects on the soul.⁵ Within the Neoplatonic tradition, Plotinus is famous for having a very negative attitude towards the corporeal world; matter never participates in the forms, which are thrown over it 'like a cloak'.⁶ On the other side of the Neoplatonic spectrum stands Iamblichus (another important source for Ficino) who, on the contrary, holds that matter is divine: as the power of the gods cannot be diminished by matter, it must participate in them. Yet in many instances in his *De mysteriis* Iamblichus too maintains that matter is basically dirty and that the soul has to be cleansed of its harmful and distracting influence.⁷ Hence we may detect a characteristically ambivalent attitude towards embodiment in the entire Platonic tradition: for the individual soul, matter is a prison, but from the perspective of creation as a whole, matter is a necessary constituent of the cosmos.⁸ As we shall see, both approaches towards the material world are present in Ficino's philosophy: the concept of matter as something base and mean, lowest in the hierarchy of being, as well as the idea that matter is something divine, even God's first creation, and that, in varying degrees, all things, even intellectual beings, are composed of matter and form.⁹ This paradoxical condition renders the concept of *materia* especially conducive to non-discursive structures of legitimation or explanation, e.g. to metaphors, which are ultimately based on the narrative strategies of myth.

⁵ Yet 'even the optimistic *Timaeus* touched briefly on the cause for this pessimism in its description of the confusion that attends the embodiment of the soul (*Timaeus*, 44)', Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, University Park, Pa., 1995, p. 37; Kevin Corrigan, *Plotinus' Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance: Plato, Aristotle, and Alexander of Aphrodisias*, Louvain, 1996, p. 3 says: 'The idea that matter should possess both positive and negative characteristics is profoundly puzzling, as Plato himself explicitly recognizes in his account of the curious nature of the receptacle of becoming in the *Timaeus* (49A-52D).'

⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads*, III.6.11.

⁷ On Iamblichus and his positive assessment of matter in connection with his theurgical doctrines, see Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, passim, esp. p. 24. See also Beate Nasemann, *Theurgie und Philosophie in Iamblichus' De mysteriis*, Stuttgart, 1991, pp. 237-39. On the negative effects of matter on the soul, see Shaw, p. 39 ff.

⁸ On this, see Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, p. 46; Nasemann, *Theurgie und Philosophie*, p. 244; Corrigan, *Plotinus' Theory of Matter-Evil*, p. 48.

⁹ On this originally Proclan metaphysics, see Allen, 'Ficino's Theory of the Five

To complicate things further, we also have to take into account that Ficino not only rediscovered a wide range of texts from the Platonic tradition, but inherited too an elaborate scholastic tradition with a distinctively Aristotelian flavour. In his *Commentarius in Tīmaeum*, Ficino even implies that Aristotle's and Plato's doctrines of matter were in agreement.¹⁰ We may conclude that Ficino found himself in the middle of a highly contentious debate on matter that was intrinsic to both the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions.

Let us look more closely at how matter and form mingle and unite. In most instances, Ficino describes the descent of soul into the corporeal world as a disastrous event that imprisons a spiritual being in a body and diverts soul from its proper goal, intellectual contemplation.¹¹ Hence the failure of soul consists in directing its energies towards the lower part of creation; instead of contemplating the real forms, it turns to the realm of shadows and is deceived by mere reflections. Ficino says: 'Only our soul, I say, is so captivated by the charms of corporeal beauty that it neglects its own beauty, and forgetting itself, runs after the beauty of the body, which is a mere shadow of its own beauty.'¹² In good Platonic manner, Ficino links this deviant movement of the soul towards deceptive images in bodies to the myth of Narcissus: this story will turn out to be crucial for an understanding of the role of matter in Ficino's metaphysics as well as his cosmology.

Substances', p. 38 ff., quoting Ficino, *Opera omnia*, two vols, continuously paginated, Basel, 1576, p. 1166.

¹⁰ On Ficino's *Tīmaeus* commentary, see M. J. B. Allen, 'Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's *Tīmaeus* and its Myth of the Demiurge', in *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. by J. Hankins, J. Monfasani and F. Purnell, Jr., Binghamton, NY, 1987, pp. 399–439, reprinted in M. J. B. Allen, *Plato's Third Eye: Studies in Marsilio Ficino's Metaphysics and its Sources*, Aldershot, 1995.

¹¹ Cf. Ficino's *Argumentum in Theologiam Platoniam* (*Opera omnia*, p. 713), which just after quoting Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI.730–34, remarks, 'Anima, tenebroso corporis huius carcere circumsaepa, mirabile veritatis lumen et vera quae mirifice in illo refulgent minime percipit, quia minimam ad illud habet proportionem', cited in Marsilio Ficino, *Traktate zur platonischen Philosophie*, ed. by Elisabeth Blum, Paul Richard Blum and Thomas Leinkauf, Berlin, 1993, p. 86; Michael J. B. Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of his 'Phaedrus' Commentary, its Sources and Genesis*, Berkeley etc., 1984, ch. 7.

¹² 'anima, inquam, sola ita corporalis formae blanditiis delinitur ut propriam posthabeat spetiem, corporis vero formam, quae suae umbra est, sui ipsius oblita sectetur', *De amore*, VI.17 in Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, ed. and tr. by Raymond Marcel, Paris, 1956, p. 235; *Opera omnia*, p. 1353. Translated by Sears Jayne in Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, 2nd edn, Dallas, Tex., 1985, pp. 140–41.

Hence the tragic fate of Narcissus, which Orpheus records. Hence the pitiable calamity of men. Narcissus, *who is obviously young*, that is, the soul of rash and inexperienced man. *Does not look at his own face*, that is, does not notice its own substance and character at all. *But admires the reflection of it in the water and tries to embrace that*; that is, the soul admires in the body, which is unstable and in flux, like water, a beauty which is the shadow of the soul itself. *He abandons his own beauty, but he never reaches the reflection*. That is, the soul, in pursuing the body, neglects itself but finds no gratification in its use of the body. For it does not really desire the body itself; rather, seduced, like Narcissus, by corporeal beauty, which is an image of its own beauty, it desires its own beauty. And since it never notices the fact that, while it is desiring one thing, it is pursuing another, it never satisfies its desire. For this reason, *melted into tears, he is destroyed*; that is, when soul is located outside itself, in this way, and has sunken into the body, it is racked by terrible passions and, stained by the filths of the body, it dies, as it were, since it now seems to be a body rather than a soul.¹³

Amazingly to the modern reader, Ficino (or rather the Orphic source he comments on) maintains that Narcissus does not look at his *own* face, but sees something different in the unstable reflection of the water; a beauty which is only a shadow. Narcissus is here not an emblem for conscious self-love, but rather an allegory for soul which falls victim to the deceiving powers of a reflection in a mirror. The reflecting surface of the pool gets tied to a negative description of the corporeal world, the mirror serves as an allegory for soul's calamitous descent into body. Obviously, Ficino's interpretation of the Narcissus myth is different from our own associations with this story, best known to modern readers in Ovid's version. This was highly popular throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages and was linked

¹³ Ibid.: 'Hinc crudelissimum illud apud Orpheum Narcissi fatum. Hinc hominum miseranda calamitas. *Narcissus quidem adolescens*, id est, temerarii et imperiti hominis animus. *Sui vultum non aspicit*, propriam sui substantiam et virtutem nequaquam animadvertit. *Sed eius umbram in aqua prosequitur et amplecti conatur*, id est, pulchritudinem in fragili corpore et instar aquae fluenti, quae ipsius animi umbra est, admiratur. *Suam quidem figuram deserit. Umbram numquam assequitur*. Quoniam animus corpus sectando se negligit et usu corporis non impletur. Non enim ipsum revera appetit corpus sed sui ipsius spetiem a corporali forma, quae spetie suae imago est, illectus, quemadmodum Narcissus, affectat. Cumque id minime advertat, dum aliud quidem cupit, aliud sequitur, desiderium suum explere non potest. *Ideo in lacrimas resolutus consumitur*, id est, animus ita extra se positus et delapsus in corpus, perniciosius perturbationibus cruciatur corporisque infectus sordibus quasi moritur, cum iam corpus esse potius quam animus videatur.' On the source Ficino here refers to, see *Orphica fragmenta*, ed. by O. Kern, Berlin, 1922, fr. 315.

to the soul's descent into the material world.¹⁴ According to Ovid, Narcissus is chastised by Eros for his refusal to participate in the sexual life appropriate to free Greek men by sharing his body with men and women alike.¹⁵ The punishment of the beautiful youth, solicited by a rejected lover—the nymph Echo—consists in falling in love with his own image, a reflection he continues to worship in Hades even after his death.

Three centuries later, Plotinus relates this story to an entirely different context, namely the soul's failure to contemplate the higher world, getting lost instead in the shadowy and totally illusory world of matter:

When he sees the beauty in bodies he must not run after them; we must know that they are images, traces, shadows, and hurry away to that which they image. For if a man runs to the image and wants to seize it as if it was the reality (like a beautiful reflection playing on the water, which some story somewhere, I think, said riddlingly a man wanted to catch and sank down into the stream and disappeared) then this man who clings to beautiful bodies and will not let them go, will, like the man in the story, but in soul, not in body, sink down into the dark depths where intellect has no delight, and stay blind in Hades, consorting with shadows there and here.¹⁶

Here the original meaning of the Ovidian myth is significantly altered. Plotinus remodels the story of Narcissus into an allegory of the worldly temptations of the soul which distract it from its proper goal, contemplation of the eternal forms. Narcissus's fate is sealed by his erroneous dedication to the embodied and treacherous world of corporeal beings, shadows of the higher truths. His transgression consists in ignoring or forgetting the origin of the reflection in the water, namely, that the soul is the cause of the corporeal shadow.¹⁷ According to Plotinus, it was Narcissus's own fault, not his punishment, that he

¹⁴ On the myth of Narcissus, see Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, *Dans l'oeil du miroir*, Paris, 1997, pp. 200–41.

¹⁵ Frontisi-Ducroux, *Dans l'oeil du miroir*, p. 240: 'Le mythe qui fait mourir Narcisse met en scène l'erreur du jeune homme qui ignore l'indispensable détour par autrui que le mâle doit accomplir pour devenir lui-même, pour devenir sujet.'

¹⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.8, ed. and tr. by A. H. Armstrong, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 7 vols, 1966–88, I, p. 257.

¹⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.8.2. See Pierre Hadot, 'Le mythe de Narcisse et son interprétation chez Plotin', *Narcisses. Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse*, 13 (1976), pp. 81–108, at p. 99. 'Si Narcisse entend pour une réalité substantielle ce qui n'est qu'un reflet, c'est qu'il ignore la relation entre ce reflet et lui-même. Il ne comprend pas qu'il est lui-même la cause de cette ombre.'

drowned in the pond. His fate is an allegory for the soul which ceases to contemplate the hierarchy of being and falls in love with the base images of its own making.¹⁸ In a move that is central to his philosophy, Plotinus dismisses the idea that the descent of soul into the corporeal world is a creative and positive act (as opposed to a dramatic event). Hence, ironically, by using the story of Narcissus to illustrate the descent of soul into the world, Plotinus opens the horizon for an entirely different understanding of the myth: Narcissus, by gazing at the reflecting surface, imprints his form onto matter and hence he shapes and to a certain extent even creates the corporeal world.

The Plotinian version of the Narcissus story certainly appealed to Ficino for its moralizing content, but he inserted it into a different context. Plotinus had assumed that soul and body never enter into a unity, matter being a mere reflection and product of the lowest parts of soul.¹⁹ In Ficino this is different; for him matter and soul enter into a union of some kind.

This idea refers us to another important text, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which Ficino translated. Here, Hermes recounts a story which is eerily reminiscent of the Narcissus myth in describing how primordial man, still immortal and without a body, fell in love with his own image as reflected in nature. This love story originated when primordial man saw the reflection of his own body in the water whereupon 'he desired to be united to it'. This desire was answered by Nature, who, after being united to primordial man, gave birth to ordinary man, who is half mortal and half immortal, composed of a soul and a body.²⁰ In this version the versatility of the Narcissus theme becomes obvious: according to the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the reflection of the body of primordial man does not cause tragic destruction, but rather is a model for a creative process. This version of

¹⁸ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.8; Frontisi-Ducroux, *Dans l'oeil du miroir*, p. 222 ff.; Hadot, 'Le mythe de Narcisse', p. 107.

¹⁹ Hadot, 'Le mythe de Narcisse', p. 100 ff.; Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.1.12.

²⁰ *Pimander*, I.14 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1837 ff.) '[natura] . . . utpote qui humanae pulchritudinis speciem in aqua specularetur, eiusdemque admirationem quandam in terra conspiceret, illic praeterea consecutus similem sibi formam in seipso existentem, velut in aqua amavit eam, secumque congrredi concupivit. Effectus e vestigio secutus est voluntatem, formamque carentem ratione progenuit. Natura illud, in quod toto ferebatur amore, complexa, illi penitus sese implicuit, atque commiscuit, quandoquidem solus homo ex universis terrenis animantibus duplicis naturae censetur, mortalis quidem propter corpus, immortalis autem propter hominem ipsum substantialem, immortalis enim est . . .'

the story is different from Plotinus's account in another crucial respect: according to the *Corpus Hermeticum*, nature or matter was already there, pre-existed and hence was different. Primordial man only fell in love with it and shaped the already extant and desiring matter by mingling with it. Ficino's cosmology in that respect refers to the *Corpus Hermeticum*, rather than to Plotinus.

The myth of the *Corpus Hermeticum* also allows us to make a sexual reading of the relationship between bodies and souls as related in this particular Narcissus myth, the relationship between matter and form within a heterosexual context: male soul gets attracted by beautiful female matter and eventually falls for her, without recognizing her as his own image in the material world. According to Ovid, on the other hand, Narcissus consciously perceives the image in the pond as his *own* reflection and eventually perishes in the activity of self-speculation. Ovid's version, which unequivocally shows that Narcissus is in love with the reflection he perceives as male, since it is an image of himself, is therefore set in a homoerotic context characteristic of the social and political situation in classical Greece.²¹ Hence, any suppression of the homoerotic context of the Narcissus tale emphasizes the deceptive potential of the mirror, which comes to be identified as an instrument that transforms the images it reflects.²²

Common to all these stories is the fact that mirror-reflections are identified as instrumental in self-cognition as well as self-deception, and that the mirror has the capacity to change the active gaze into a passive object, which is victimized by its own glance. Ficino was able to apply the myth of Narcissus to a wider range of phenomena than it had applied to so far: primordial man may recognize his shadow in nature just as humans may recognize in their debased mirror-images themselves, their bodies or other products of their skill. This assumption links the myth of Narcissus to the Pygmalion episode, another story recounted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Here the sculptor

²¹ In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, III.455, Narcissus cries out 'Whoever you are, come out to me! Oh boy beyond compare, why do you elude me?' (tr. Mary Innes, London, 1955, p. 86). According to Hadot, 'Le mythe de Narcisse', p. 93, Ovid is the only author in classical antiquity where Narcissus is not entirely deceived by the reflection in the water.

²² I am conscious that the terms homoerotic and heterosexual are perhaps anachronistic; in the present context, they are only meant to denote sexual relationships between males or between men and women and not the constitution of subjective identities. I shall address this topic in a forthcoming paper on Ficino's reading of the myth of the androgyne in Plato's *Symposium*.

falls in love with one of his statues, which eventually, by divine intervention, becomes alive. The tale of Pygmalion is set by Ovid in a characteristic context of artistry and misogyny that must have been highly attractive to Renaissance minds, and again underscores the idea that the soul's shaping of the material world ultimately relies on a Narcissistic strategy of self-fashioning, e.g. in the recognition of one's own beauty in a material mirror.²³ In this context, a quote from Ficino's letters is à propos:

If each of us, essentially, is that which is greatest within us, which always remains the same and by which we understand ourselves, then certainly the soul is the man himself and the body but his shadow. Whatever wretch is so deluded as to think that the shadow of man is man, like Narcissus is dissolved into tears.²⁴

In a process like that of Narcissus or Pygmalion, falling in love with an image of their own making, the roles of active subject (soul) and passive object (matter) become inverted and may prove perilous to the onlooker. Soul runs the risk of becoming entirely immersed in body, of being killed like Narcissus by a deceptive image. Taken together with the fact that the nexus between soul and body is deeply emotional, it implies that matter has significant and potentially threatening power. Hence only to a limited extent does it remain subordinate to form. This gives rise to anxieties about the potential vindictiveness of matter, which might take revenge for form's attempt entirely to vanquish it. The potential vulnerability of soul leads to anxieties about infiltration, penetration and contamination, and to fears of being transformed from agent into recipient, from active into passive, from male into female. The fear about soul's boundaries hence harks back to the violence implicit in the Narcissistic act of creation that left no room for otherness and the world. Ironically, it is precisely this negation which is decisive for the fate of Narcissus. He drowns in the pond of matter *because* he fails to acknowledge the reflection in the water as his own image. This is at bottom a male strategy of self-fashioning, which not only entails a fantasy of absolute

²³ On Pygmalion, see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, X.240 ff.; a special irony lies in the fact that according to Ovid the Propoetides, the whorish women of Pygmalion's home town, are eventually turned into stone (*Met.*, X.238-42).

²⁴ *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, 6 vols to date, London, 1975-, I, p. 54, Letter 12, dated 1 August 1473.

power intrinsic to that process, but at the same time betrays a deep anxiety that female matter actually will *not* be fully dominated at all.²⁵ Crucially, domination, and with it order, is achieved through a Narcissistic, self-reflective gaze. Hence Narcissus is at fault because he did not know the mechanism of self-reflection which shapes the material world; his death rather underscores the efficacy of the process.²⁶

I conclude that the erotic, potentially uncontrollable involvement of soul with matter deeply worried Ficino, yet, paradoxically he developed a cosmology that put particular emphasis on the domination of matter by soul by transferring the model of the Narcissistic and creative gaze to the story of divine Creation.

The idea of a Narcissistic gaze which orders, even creates, the world is rooted in one of the most fascinating (in the literal sense of the word) accounts of cosmogenesis to be found in Ficino. A crucial passage in that context is *Theologia Platonica*, XVII.2, which promises to explain the ideas of the two last Platonic academies about soul.²⁷ Ficino begins by stating that, according to Plato, God

²⁵ These remarks are indebted to Stanley Cavell's essay on the relationship between Othello and Desdemona in Shakespeare, in his *Disowning Knowledge*, Cambridge, Mass., 1987, pp. 125–42.

²⁶ What of the fate of Echo? After all, Narcissus is punished because he refuses the Nymph's love, which emphasizes his reckless attitude towards other humans, the embodied world. I am reluctant to include Echo here, for several reasons: 1) the gendered relationship between Narcissus and Echo is very complex; furthermore, I think that Ovid mainly wanted to emphasize the parallelism between the voice that is thrown back on the one hand and the image that is reflected in the pond on the other (a similar parallelism between voice and image is to be found in Aristotle, *De anima*, 419a–b); 2) because my focus here is on the Narcissus story in the broader context of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and in Plotinus, and 3) Echo is not mentioned in Ficino's account of the Narcissus story.

²⁷ *Theologia Platonica*, XVII.2, in Ficino, *Theologie platonicienne de l'immortalité des âmes*, ed. and tr. by R. Marcel, 3 vols, Paris, 1964–70, III, pp. 149–50; *Opera omnia*, pp. 386–87: 'Plato in Parmenide [137D] quidem Deum vocat infinitum, in Philebo [16D–23C] vero nominat terminum. Infinitum scilicet, quia nullum aliunde accipit terminum, Terminum autem, quia formis quasi mensuris passim distributis omnia terminat. Hinc Platonici disputant, quatenus Deus tamquam infinitus omnem a se excludit terminum, eatenus ferme ex eo quasi umbram pendere potentiam quamdam quasi materialem termini cuiuslibet indigam informemque natura sua et, ut ita loquar, indefinitam. At vero quatenus Deus tamquam terminus umbram suam respicit tamquam speculum, eatenus in umbra iam velut imaginem resurgere infinitatemque ipsam, id est materiam communissimam, formis ordinatissime terminari. Idem rursus ita confirmat. Si in Deo semper est universi faciendi potestas, merito semper extra Deum universi, ut ita loquar, fieri [est] potentia. Non enim facere ille semper omnia posset, ut opinantur, nisi semper fieri omnia possent. Potentiam eiusmodi materiam communissimam, id est vim formarum omnium

is the infinite (*Parmenides*, 137D) as well as the limit (*Philebus*, 16D–23C). He is infinite because he does not accept limits from anything else and the limit because he determines (defines) all beings by means of the forms or measures which he imposes on them. Apart from this paradoxical God, there exists a certain indefinite and formless potency, which is, *as it were*, a shadow in need of being limited. It is crucial to my argument that Ficino explicitly identifies this shadow with ‘most common matter’. When God looks at this shadow/matter it turns into a mirror, reflecting the image of the creator. Hence, matter is a mere (yet primordial) shadow, something without real existence, that God converts into a mirror reflecting his own image. Matter is created and at the same time shaped by a divine glance. By begetting matter in this way, the supreme creator does not part with anything, does not lose or even diminish his integrity: he only gazes at his own image.²⁸

In accordance with this, Ficino maintains that matter, after being shaped by the divine glance, represents divine unity according to its own diminished capacity, in a ‘shadowy way’. Thus, matter is God’s first creation, but that is not all: as God could have created

aequaliter receptricem nominant, quae natura sua neque ad ipsum esse vergat, alioquin superno formatore non indigeret, neque ad non esse, alioquin formatori non obediret, sed ad esse pariter atque non esse; item ad formas tales aut tales quasi medium quoddam aequae se habeat atque a formatore determinetur. Sit quoque in omnibus una, non numero, non specie, non genere, sed analogia et proportione quadam potius, scilicet quoniam ab uno dependet atque unius Dei infinitatem, utcumque potest, modo quodam umbratili repraesentat, quemadmodum et actus quodammodo unus in omnibus nominatur, quoniam ab uno terminatore et unius terminationem imaginarie refert. Atque actus huiusmodi potentiam superat, propterea quod a Deo manat non fugiente ulterius, sed iam respiciente materiam. Huiusmodi potentia in spiritibus nonnihil corporis habere videtur, siquidem in mentibus habet corporum rationes, in animabus insuper motiones, in utrisque formabilem facultatem. Rursus in corporibus incorporei nonnihil videtur habere, quia et dum antecedit quantitatem, indivisibilis apparet, et semper vires quasdam quodammodo incorporeas sustinet. Ex hac infinitate, ex hoc termino, id est potentia receptrice formabilique atque actu formali constare sub Deo omnia putant.’ On the origins of this doctrine in Plotinus, see *Enneads*, II.4.5 and Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe*, p. 66 ff.; cf. also *Enneads*, IV.3.8; V.5.11; VI.5.4 & 11. For a discussion of this passage from a completely different perspective, see Ardis B. Collins, *The Secular is Sacred: Platonism and Thomism in Marsilio Ficino’s Platonic Theology*, The Hague, 1974, p. 42–46 and 61–62. On the doctrine of limit and infinite in Platonism, see the *Philebus* commentary, Bk II (ed. Allen, pp. 384–425); Michael J. B. Allen, *Icastes: Marsilio Ficino’s Interpretation of Plato’s ‘Sophist’*, Berkeley etc., 1989, pp. 61–64. See also Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, ed., tr. and comm. by E. R. Dodds, 2nd edn, Oxford, 1963, propositions 89–96, pp. 82–87.

²⁸ Actually, Ficino here is in dire need of stressing that nothing is given away, as the contrary is true in his theories of vision: see below.

the universe at any given time, matter has always existed potentially, as the withheld divine look, so to speak. Ficino then goes on to say that matter has no definite characteristics whatsoever: it is neutral and malleable and can assume any given form. As universal potentiality, matter is neither inclined towards being (because then it would not need a higher forming power), nor towards non-being (because then it would not obey the divine craftsman). The precarious relationship we have already detected between soul and matter is transferred onto the relationship of God to his shadow: disobedient matter poses an alarming threat to divine omnipotence.²⁹ The idea that matter could become such an obstacle to the divine is, I think, a direct result of the Narcissism involved in the process of creation, which always conveys a solipsistic fantasy of absolute power that does not tolerate any opposition. The evidence of the *Theologia Platonica* is corroborated by Ficino's *Philebus* commentary in which the act of creation is again described as a Narcissistic process in which God is mirrored in a shadow, matter or otherness.³⁰

The way Ficino here uses the concepts of reflection and shadow as interchangeable may seem quite awkward to the modern reader. The confusion between the two ideas dates back to classical Greece and Rome. In his version of the Narcissus story, Ovid for instance identifies mirror reflections and shadows, a feature persistent in later European literature.³¹ In spite of Plato's attempts to distinguish the two different though closely related concepts of shadow and mirror-image, the Platonic tradition nevertheless has a significant tendency not only to blur them with one another but also to link them to the ideas of imprinting onto matter the imitation of higher forms to create potentially dangerous illusions.³² Ficino writes for example that 'the light of the sun in water is a kind of shadow'.³³ The idea that

²⁹ Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads*, II.9.3.

³⁰ *Philebus* commentary (ed. Allen), p. 389: 'Ideo communis materies velut umbra quaedam fugientem sequitur Deum. Forma vero in materia velut in speculo ex quodam benefico divini vultus aspectu resultat.' 'Therefore universal matter, like some shadow, follows after God who is fleeing away. But the form in matter, as in a mirror, results from a certain beneficent glance of the divine countenance.' See also *ibid.*, p. 417.

³¹ Louise Vinge, *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century*, Lund, 1967, p. 12 and n. 33.

³² Plato, *Republic*, 510A; *Sophist*, 266c; Frontisi-Ducroux, *Dans l'oeil du miroir*, p. 171 ff.

³³ *De amore*, VI.17, ed. Marcel, p. 234, *Opera omnia*, p. 1353: 'Lumen preterea Solis in aqua umbra quaedam est...'

the shadow is a sub-category of reflection, that is, a reflection that never met a mirror, is, however, Aristotelian in origin.³⁴

The confusion between mirror reflection, shadow and imprint structures the entire complex of ideas involved in the notion of a creative and Narcissistic look at matter. The gaze, a kind of emission, as will soon become clearer, has the power to shape and to act upon the world; conversely, a shadow still carries and embodies the powers, the virtues, of the object it represents—much to the detriment of Narcissus who is killed by his own beautiful image, the product of a deceptive mirror.

Ficino's metaphorical use of mirrors is not restricted to the *Theologia Platonica* or the *Philebus* commentary. In his earlier work on the *Symposium*, he used *specula* in a similar context where the divine order is propagated throughout the whole universe by a set of three mirrors. Ficino begins by stating that prior to the act of creation everything, even the second hypostasis, mind, is a dark shadow in need of illumination by divine light: 'that light descending from God is certainly not received by the mind (in its own nature dark) with as much brightness as it is given by God. Therefore, through the violence of the receiving nature the light becomes darker.'³⁵ If we read this passage together with *Theologia Platonica* XVII.2, it becomes obvious that the primordial shadow is identical with universal matter. Mind too originally consists of dark and passive matter which in the process of creation becomes activated by the godhead.³⁶ For by speaking of the impetuosity (*nature violentia*) of the angelic mind, Ficino underscores the idea that even the second hypostasis shows a resistant quality, the trait characteristic of all matter. The same applies to primordial soul, as we learn from the commentary on the *Timaeus*: here Ficino says that in its primordial state the soul, too, was passive and easily malleable matter, only subsequently to be illuminated

³⁴ Aristotle, *De anima*, 419b; Frontisi-Ducroux, *Dans l'oeil du miroir*, p. 171; Giulio Guidorizzi, 'Lo specchio e la mente: un sistema d'intersezioni', in *La maschera, il doppio e il ritratto*, ed. by Maurizio Bettini, Bari, 1992, pp. 31–46, at p. 37, with references.

³⁵ *De amore*, V.11, ed. Marcel, pp. 195–96; *Opera omnia*, p. 1340; tr. Jayne, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, p. 100: 'mens . . . diligit auctorem. . . lumen illud a deo descendens non tanta claritate recipiatur a mente natura sua obscura, quanta a deo tribuitur. . . Ideo violentia nature suscipientis fit lumen obscurius' (my italics). On chaos in the different hypostases, see Michael J. B. Allen, 'Cosmogony and Love: The Role of Phaedrus in Ficino's *Symposium* Commentary', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 10 (1980), pp. 131–53, at pp. 140–42.

³⁶ On this see also the *Philebus* commentary, II.4, ed. Allen, p. 417.

by intellect.³⁷ Body, too, receives the divine forms in an analogous manner, so that Ficino arrives at a set of three mirrors reflecting and thus transmitting the divine order onto the entire creation. Communication between the higher and lower parts of the universe is achieved by rays of light which increasingly materialize as they pass downwards through the hypostases—that is, the ontological entities—which Ficino equates with mirrors.³⁸

As soon as the angels and the souls are born from him, the divine power . . . infuses into them the ray in which there is a fecund power of creating all things. This imprints the arrangement and order of the whole world much more exactly in them [*sc.* the angels and souls], because they are nearer to him, than in the matter of the world. . . . In the angels, these pictures are called by the Platonists archetypes or ideas; in the souls they are called reasons or concepts; in the matter of the world they are called forms or images. They are certainly bright in the world, brighter in the soul and brightest in the angelic mind. Therefore the single face of God shines successively in three mirrors, placed in order: the Angel, the soul and the body of the world. . . . In the most remote . . . most dimly.³⁹

³⁷ *Timaeus* commentary, 40 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1464): 'Mundus est ex intellectu et necessitate compositus, id est, ex ipso formarum ordine atque materia. Possumus quinetiam sub necessitatis nomine intelligere, non materiam solum, sed animam quoque eius in primo processionis suae signo, signo velut informem materiae instar consideratam. Utraque enim, tam anima, quam materia, in primo originis suae signo informis quidem est, sed facile et formabilis per intelligentiae munus, unde et ipsi animae rationis seminaque formarum naturalium infunduntur, et materiae qualitates atque formae. . . . Necessitate, sic accipe, ut prima illa materiae animaeque natura quamvis cogitetur informis, tamen praeparationem a Deo ad formas adeo formabilem susceperit ab initio, ut non potuerit esse paratior.' In *De amore*, V.11, ed. Marcel, p. 195; *Opera omnia*, p. 1340, Ficino identifies the descent of light into material darkness with the alternate reigns of necessity and of intellect in Plato's *Timaeus*, 34–35.

³⁸ Ficino identifies demons and rays in his *De vita*, III.23 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1293; *Three Books on Life*, ed. and tr. by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark, Binghamton, NY, 1989, p. 377). See also Ficino's commentary on the *Sophist* in Allen's *Icastes*, p. 271, lines 18–21: 'Et in lumine potestas quaedam est daemonica, effectrix videlicet imaginum et umbrarum, quemadmodum et daemones solent mira quaedam visa non solum dormientibus sed abstractis sed etiam vigilantibus ostentare.'

³⁹ *De amore* V.4, ed. Marcel, pp. 184–85; *Opera omnia*, p. 1336; tr. Jayne, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, pp. 89–90: 'Divina potestas . . . statim a se natis angelis atque animis, suum illum radium in quo fecunda vis inest omnium creandorum, . . . infundit. Hic in eis utpote sibi propinquioribus totius mundi dispositionem et ordinem multo pingit exactius quam in mundi materia. . . . Picturae huiusmodi in angelis, exemplaria et ideae, in animis, rationes et notiones, in orbis materia, formae atque imagines a Platonicis nominantur. Clarae quidem in orbe, clariores in animo, in angeli mente clarissimae. Unus igitur Dei vultus tribus deinceps per ordinem positus lucet in speculis: angelo, animo, corpore mundi. . . . In hoc remotissimo . . . obscurissime.'

In an important move, Ficino here equates all the hypostases to mirrors which reflect the divine forms. Towards the bottom of creation, these mirrors become increasingly unable to adequately reproduce the divine order, just as the light reflected in a series of mirrors gradually becomes fainter.

Ficino emphasizes the constant degradation of matter and form which is due to the shadow's incapacity to represent the higher realities in their fullness. The idea of a gradual transition from divine splendour to bodily darkness is prominent in the relatively early commentaries on the *Symposium* and the *Timaeus*. In his late work on the *Sophist* Ficino moreover acknowledges, in Allen's words, the 'the co-presence (if not coexistence exactly) of being and not-being not at the extremes of an ontological hierarchy but *within each* existent in that hierarchy'.⁴⁰ Hence, according to Ficino's later interpretation, the transition from light to darkness happens at every stage in the hierarchy of being; every hypostasis is identified with a mirror that undergoes a radical transformation in the process of being illuminated by the divine ray. What was formerly dark and passive becomes bright and active, the object being transformed into subject in the process.⁴¹

I hope I have given enough evidence to indicate the ways in which the mirror, which is a signifier for matter, shadow and otherness becomes a crucial metaphor in Ficino's metaphysics. The *speculum* becomes the omnipresent image of all transactions between 'above' and 'below,' a metaphor that may be used whenever Ficino wants to bridge gaps, especially when he needs to explain the communication between spiritual and corporeal substances, between form and matter, between male and female. The mirror functions as a medium of transmission and, at the same time, as a potentially deceptive screen reproducing divine order on a lower level.

The motif of three mirrors reflecting the ideas or archetypes in varying degrees of refinement is also present in Alain of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*. This text mentions a glass mirror where the forms appear mixed with subjects; a silver mirror, which reflects primordial matter as well as forms in their purer state; and lastly a looking-glass

⁴⁰ Allen, *Icastes*, p. 69.

⁴¹ Allen, *Icastes*, p. 69 ff. In the *Timaeus* commentary, 40 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1463), Ficino maintains that each celestial sphere is, as it were, a world in itself: 'Hinc fit quod saepe dicimus, ut quaelibet sphaera mundi, quasi totus sit mundus, cuncta videlicet sua quadam proprietate complectens.'

made of gold, in which the ideas themselves can be perceived.⁴² In Dante's *Divina commedia* the idea of a hierarchy of mirrors which reflect the image of God on a lower level appears in a different context; here the mirrors do not render a *darker* image (as in Ficino) but a *smaller* one.⁴³

In elaborating this referential structure Ficino had several Platonic myths to draw on: firstly, the myth of the cave (whose inhabitants are only able to perceive the shadows of real things), secondly, the assumption that humans cannot look at truth directly, but only at its reflection in water (*Phaedo*, 99D, 100A), and thirdly, the myth in *Phaedrus*, 255D about the birth of love, which is mirrored by a glance. But fourthly and perhaps most crucially, Ficino was able to refer to Plato's metaphor of the mirror which (re)produces a false image of the cosmos (*Republic*, 596c) which together with a passage from the *Sophist* (239D–240B) became decisive for subsequent Neoplatonic theories of the image.⁴⁴ Here Plato maintains that mirror-images fall into the same category as the products of any other artist: they are deceptive images which all result from an imprint of a form which is ontologically higher and therefore more real. The term 'fabrication of images' (*eidolopoia*) denotes not only the formation of a reflection in a mirror but all kinds artistic production (*Timaeus*, 46A; *Critias*, 107B).

Accordingly, Ficino in his *Sophist* commentary maintains that images in a mirror not only exist, but also have their 'own act and mode'.⁴⁵ Like matter, the shadow is not completely deprived of being,

⁴² See Peter Dronke, *Fabula. Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism*, Leiden, 1974, p. 148, n. 2, with references.

⁴³ Dante, *Paradiso*, II.97–105. On this, see James L. Miller, 'The Three Mirrors in Dante's *Paradiso*', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 46 (1977), p. 266 ff.

⁴⁴ On this, see Allen, *Icastes*, p. 170 ff., and Frontisi-Ducroux, *Dans l'oeil du miroir*, p. 164.

⁴⁵ Commentary on the *Sophist*, in Allen, *Icastes*, p. 273, line 31: 'quasi actum suum modumque proprium habeant'. According to Allen, the source is Proclus, *In Rempublicam*, ed. Festugière, II.98 ff. Allen further argues, 'It follows from the whole set of negative hypotheses in the Neo-Platonists' *Parmenides* . . . that, since the One exists both absolutely and immanently, then not only do the realms of Mind, of Soul, of the corporeal forms, and of body itself exist but also, in a unitary if insubstantial way, does the realm of shadows and of dreams; and it exists immediately subordinate to the realm of corporeal forms and material species upon which it directly depends and of which it is an imitation', *Icastes*, p. 169. For a parallel quote, see the commentary on the *Timaeus*, Appendix, 30 (*Opera omnia*, p. 1473). 'Quae quidem nimis exilem habent [sc. imagines] essentiam, ut non aliter palam ostentare se oculis possint, quam in corporibus specularibus aequabiliter stabilitae,

the image in the mirror remains 'a something' leading a life of its own. Here it becomes plain that mirrors do not merely *reflect*, they also have the capacity to *retain* the forms they receive, like a womb. Actually, this is the obvious conclusion to be drawn from Ficino's cosmology: We only have to remember that each hypostasis first behaves like a mirror/shadow/matter collecting the higher influence which it then independently transmits to the next lower echelon of being down to the bottom of creation. Hence the process of creation entails that each hypostasis retains the images from above, transforms them and again reflects them onto the level beneath. Ficino consequently parallels the qualities of matter and mirror, that is, transformation and retention of the received forms, and subsequent reflection (birth) of new images. Images do retain some of the power inherent in the things they represent, albeit to a lesser extent:

Proclus adds that magicians are accustomed to affect things' images and shadows in marvellous ways, and by means of these affected images and shadows similarly to affect the things themselves. It is as if the images and shadows had some nature of their own that reached to things and that through this nature a certain mutual sympathy can be achieved.⁴⁶

The passage mentioned earlier, in Plato's *Republic*, 596c, where the mirror is said to reproduce a false image of the cosmos is again crucial. The Neoplatonic tradition links this passage to the myth of the demiurge in the *Timaeus*, who by looking at divine forms creates an image of heaven and earth. In doing so, the divine craftsman produces an appearance or likeness of the realm of ideas. This image-creating by the demiurge is imitated by a so-called sublunar demiurge or by humans, who are images of the higher demiurge. Sophists, rhetoricians and magi (who are the human demiurges) are therefore likewise trafficking with all kinds of truth-images, or mirrors of truths.⁴⁷ Given this context, it is by no means surprising if Allen concludes

redintegratae, illustratae, pristinam vim quamdam modumque formae, unde processere, recipiant.'

⁴⁶ Commentary on the *Sophist*, in Allen, *Icastes*, p. 275, lines 6–10: 'Adiungit Proclus solere magos miris modis afficere rerum imagines atque umbras, hisque affectis similiter res ipsas afficere, quasi imagines atque umbrae naturam aliquam habeant suam ad res atinentem, per quam mutua quaedam fieri compassio valeat.'

⁴⁷ Allen, *Icastes*, p. 170 ff. On the connections between magic and rhetoric see Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition*, Oxford, 1995, p. 306. On this topic with special reference to Ficino, see Paola Zambelli, *L'ambigua natura della magia: filosofi, streghe, riti nel Rinascimento*, Milan, 1991, p. 29 ff.

that 'The magician has the knowledge and ability either to employ a mirror to concentrate and direct rays, or even in a mysterious way to use himself as a mirror.'⁴⁸ This idea is confirmed by Michael Psellus's treatise *De daemonibus*, which Ficino translated. Here the demons communicate with the souls of men in the same way that objects appear in mirrors or things like mirrors. The demonic messages, thus generated by a certain specular art involving sophistic deception, motivate humans to perform all sorts of actions.⁴⁹ Here we only have to remember that according to Ficino all created things function analogously to the mirror, being transformed from passive material object into active formal subject by reflecting an image.

It is precisely this paradoxical quality of reflection and imprisonment, a form of 'embodiment without body' that allows the mirror to become Ficino's most concise metaphor for the state of matter. Like matter, the mirror willingly receives and embodies any form; hence the paradoxical condition of matter, namely that it is supposed to remain unchanged in the process of receiving and embodying the myriad forms, is solved. As a tool that embodies forms without a body, Ficino's mirror is the perfect vehicle to adapt Plotinus's teaching that matter was the 'shadow of a shadow'. In the mirror, actual bodies seem to vanish and hence to become nothing but a mere optical illusion. The equation of mirror and matter therefore precludes the association of matter with any sort of tactile perception. But this is only half the story, as we know that even in the higher and highest levels of being, the reflected image retains its material character, albeit in different degrees of refinement.

Towards the lower end of creation, the objects (which mirrors retain and subsequently reflect) become increasingly tangible and tied

⁴⁸ Allen, *Icastes*, p. 192; see also *Opera omnia*, p. 941 (Letters, Lib. IX, to Martin Uranius) and M. J. B. Allen, *Nuptial Arithmetic: Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on the Fatal Number in Book VIII of Plato's 'Republic'*, Berkeley etc., 1994, pp. 96–100.

⁴⁹ *Opera omnia*, p. 1941: 'Sicut enim aer praesente lumine colores, et formas accipiens traducit in illa quae naturaliter accipere possunt; sicut apparet in speculis, rebusque quasi specularibus: sic et daemonica corpora suscipientia ab ea, quae intus est, essentia phantastica figuras atque colores, et quascunque ipsi vulerunt formas in ipsum animale, nostrumque spiritum transmittunt, multa nobis negotia praebent, voluntates et consilia suggerentes, formas subindicantes, suscitantes memorias voluptatum, simulacra passionum frequenter concitantes vigilantibus atque dormientibus, nonnumquam vero femora nobis ac inguina titillantibus, incitantes insanos, et iniquos amores subiiciunt et subacuunt, precipue vero si humores calidos humidosque ad id conducentes nacti fuerunt. Sed hi Plutonis galeam subinducentes perturbant animas arte quadam et sophistica fraude.'

to women and procreation. A material exchange takes place between object and reflecting surface, to such an extent that the reflected object may even stain the mirror. Not quite unexpectedly Ficino repeats the Aristotelian story of the menstruating woman who looked at herself in the mirror and the image it reflected assumed the colour of blood.

Ficino comes up with this story in his commentary on the *Symposium*, when he accounts for love as a kind of infectious disease, transmitted by the visual ray emitted by the eyes.

Aristotle writes that women, when the menstrual blood flows down, often soil a mirror with bloody drops by their own gaze. This happens, I think, from the fact that the spirit, which is a vapour of the blood, seems to be a kind of blood so thin that it escapes the sight of the eyes, but becoming thicker on the surface of a mirror, it is clearly observed. If this falls on some less dense material, such as cloth or wood, it is not seen, for the reason that it does not remain on the surface of that thing but sinks into it. If it falls on something dense but rough, such as stones, bricks, and the like, because of the roughness of that body it is dissipated and broken up. But a mirror, on account of its hardness, stops the spirit on the surface; on account of the evenness and smoothness of its surface, it preserves it unbroken; on account of its brightness it aids and increases the spirit's own ray; on account of its cold, it forces its very fine mist into droplets.⁵⁰

Here we are confronted with a highly compressed argument, as well as a complex range of ideas, which ultimately date back to Aristotle's short treatise on dreams.⁵¹ The theoretical assumptions which structure the account of the bloody mirror may be outlined in the

⁵⁰ *De amore*, VII.4, ed. Marcel, pp. 247–48; *Opera omnia*, pp. 1357–58; tr. Jayne, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, p. 160: 'Scribit Aristoteles, mulieres quando sanguis menstruus defluit, intuitu suo speculum sanguineis guttis saepe foedare. Quod ex eo fieri arbitror quia spiritus, qui vapor sanguinis est, sanguis quidam tenuissimus videtur esse, adeo ut aspectum effugiat oculorum, sed in speculi superficie factus crassior clare perspicitur. Hic si in rariorem materiam aliquam, ceu pannum aut lignum incidat, ideo non videtur quia in superficie rei illius non restat, sed penetrat. Si in densam quidem, sed asperam, sicuti saxa, lateres et similia, corporis illius inequalitate dissipatur et frangitur. Speculum autem propter duritiem sistit in superficie spiritum; propter aequalitatem lenitatemque servat infractum; propter nitorem, spiritus ipsius radium iuvat et auget; propter frigiditatem, rarissimam illius nebulam cogit in guttulas.' For another quotation on this matter, see *Opera omnia*, pp. 941–42, 'Atque Aristoteles inquit, mulierem in purgatione menstrui sanguinis constitutam foedare sanguine quodam obiectum, speculum et imaginem.' See also Allen, *Icastes*, p. 190, n. 25. For a repetition of the same story, see Giambattista della Porta, *Della magia naturale libri XX*, Naples, 1611, VIII.15, p. 380 ff.

⁵¹ Aristotle, *De somniis*, 459b.

following way: a beam of highly refined menstrual blood is emitted by pores of the body and the sense organs in general, but in particularly concentrated form by the eyes, which in the act of perception project this vapour onto the surface of all surrounding objects. In accordance with that, Aristotle maintains that the blood will become visible only on hard and polished things, such as mirrors, otherwise it is dispersed. The story of the bloody mirror highlights the Greek idea that vision entails the exchange of material particles; to see means to enter into contact of some sort with the perceived object. Normally, this exchange is imperceptible, as the visual rays emitted by the eye are very fine; yet in the case of a very dirty, a particularly material gaze, that of a menstruating woman, the visual ray may condense on the surface of a very fine and clean mirror. The context of the observation is particularly important; no man has the capacity to stain a mirror by looking at it, only a woman can soil a mirror and only at the particularly dangerous and taboo-loaded periods in her life.⁵² This exchange of material particles has the potential to transmute distant objects, in our context to soil a clean mirror. And indeed, the story of the bloody mirror provides us with the key to the mechanisms of transmission, reflection, transformation and retention, as here the images are *captured* by a reflecting surface.

The story of the bloody mirror was one of the most famous and frequently quoted testimonies for occult phenomena such as infection, fascination or evil eye during the Middle Ages and the early modern period.⁵³ I think the special appeal of the bloody mirror is due to at least three different factors. Firstly, the reflecting surface here functions as a scientific optical tool, which (like a magnifying glass) enhances the human capacity for perception, thus uncovering the material principles of occult phenomena which otherwise would pass unnoticed.⁵⁴ Secondly, the mirror is a receptacle that retains

⁵² See, for example, Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, VII.15.64, ed. and tr. by H. Rackham, 10 vols, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1938–63, II, p. 549; Frontisi-Ducroux, *Dans l'œil du miroir*, pp. 147–54.

⁵³ Francis J. Kovach, 'The Enduring Question of Action at a Distance in Saint Albert the Great', in *Albert the Great: Commemorative Essays*, ed. by F. J. Kovach and R. A. Shahan, Norman, OK, 1980, p. 173 ff., with references, and p. 209 ff., esp. p. 211, n. 117.

⁵⁴ In that sense, during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance the term 'mirror' was a signifier for optical tools in general, such as magnifying lenses, crystal bowls

the blood emitted from the woman's eye. And thirdly, the bloody mirror accounts for otherwise inexplicable phenomena which may be labelled 'imposition of a higher form onto a lower passive material'. This story not only explains how divine or diabolic images may enter the mind, but also how one may be infected with a contagious disease through the gaze of an infectious person (the evil eye): to see means to enter into contact with the perceived object. Even more generally speaking, all creative processes may be explained in terms of a debased reflection in a mirror; for example, the way in which the form of a statue in the sculptor's mind is subsequently impressed onto the marble.

The blood-stained mirror is one of the few instances where women enter Ficino's discursive universe; significantly, the context of the female appearance is associated with the demonic, with action at a distance; infection through the evil eye.⁵⁵ In contradistinction to Thomas and other medieval authorities, in Ficino the idea that a material exchange takes place in the mirror is not restricted to the terrestrial realm, to the specific sociological problem of potentially contagious menstruating women. The looking-glass becomes the universalized symbol of the female aspect of creation, which is identified with the deceptive and potentially rebellious shadow intrinsic in all created beings. Once inserted into this cosmological context, the reduction of matter to a shadow of the divine form, to a 'body without a body',⁵⁶ inherently carries with it an unwanted side-effect: the corporeal, embodied world returns in the guise of the demonic, uncontrollable entities which may potentially threaten the domination of form. Because the shadow is part of, or even a creation of, the form it represents, it may to a limited extent retain the power of that form. We only have to remember that it was such a

used for divination and burning glasses. On this see Kodera, 'Ficino's Magic Mirrors' (as n. 1 above), pp. 97-100, with references.

⁵⁵ Let me emphasize that the female presence here is not a kind of allegory for virtues such as Love, Truth or Philosophy, or for goddesses such as the Muses, the Graces, Athena or Venus, but an embodied woman, a flesh and blood person.

⁵⁶ Cf. the ambiguous ontological status of images in Ficino's *Sophist* commentary, ed. Allen, p. 275, and 'spiritus' in *De vita*, III.3, ed. Kaske and Clark, p. 257. Such paradoxical beings appear to fulfil a key function as mediators, tying the world together. I think Ficino is here influenced by Michael Psellus, who in *De daemonibus* defines the demonic nature precisely in such paradoxical terms of disembodied embodiment. 'Natura daemonum non est absque corpore, sed habet corpus, et versatur circa corpora . . .' (Ficino's translation, *Opera omnia*, p. 1939).

parthenogenetic scheme of birth that brought forth the entire creation.⁵⁷ At this point, matter (which from the very beginning in the act of creation had been reduced to a mere yet omnipresent shadow) re-enters the world: not body, not form, yet perilous to the imprudent soul whose gaze is only towards the corporeal material world, with no memory of the divine source.

⁵⁷ E.g. in *Theologia Platonica*, XVII.2, where God creates the world by looking into a shadow which becomes his mirror. The physical aspect of the act of creation, involving parturition, is thus excluded. I use parthenogenetic in this sense.

FICINO, ARCHIMEDES AND THE CELESTIAL ARTS

Stéphane Toussaint*

In a letter dated 4 August 1484 to Francesco della Casa,¹ Angelo Poliziano gives a striking account of the so-called 'multiple-zodiac astronomical clock' that had recently (*nuper*) aroused extraordinary interest in Florence.² The poet describes Lorenzo della Volpaia's automaton with remarkable accuracy. We should be wary of dismissing Poliziano's description as no more than rhetoric, simply a typical humanist *ekphrasis* of the clock. Nor should we ignore deeper connections with Marsilio Ficino's own philosophical interest in Lorenzo della Volpaia's technical achievements. The text of della Casa's own letter appears to be lost but from Poliziano's reply we can appreciate his fascination with della Volpaia's automaton, in which planetary movements were shown, in harmony with the astronomical laws of the sky, on a flat dial.³ The primary interest of

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¹ For basic biography of Francesco della Casa, see the article by R. Zaccaria in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, XXXVI (1988), pp. 696–99, s.v. Della Casa.

² Angelo Poliziano, *Omnia opera*, Venice, 1498, *Epistolae* IV.8, sig. flr–v. This letter is reproduced in the appendix to this article, and all further quotations will refer to it as 'Poliziano's letter'. The designation of Lorenzo della Volpaia's clock as a 'multiple-zodiac astronomical clock' is taken from the survey by E. Poulle, *Les Instruments de la théorie des planètes selon Ptolémée: Équatoires et horlogerie planétaire du XIII^e au XVI^e siècle*, 2 vols, Geneva, 1980, I, p. 628: 'la documentation disponible sur les horloges à zodiacs multiples et voisins se présente dans des conditions peu favorables: une horloge de Valérius, qui était conservée à Dresde mais a été détruite lors de la seconde guerre mondiale... et deux textes, il vaudrait mieux parler de notes, difficiles à interpréter, l'un anonyme, l'autre relatif à l'horloge de Lorenzo della Volpaia.' Poliziano's letter is also published by Poulle but in a slightly different version, *ibid.*, II, pp. 760–61, following a Parisian edition of the *Epistolae* of c. 1515. There is a partial English version of the letter in G. H. Baillie, *Clocks and Watches. An Historical Bibliography*, London, 1951, p. 10.

³ 'machinula... in qua siderum cursus cum caeli ratione congruens explicetur'.

the humanists lay in the self-motion (*automato*) of this man-made *astrarium*.

The description was written in 1484, the very year when Ficino had the *editio princeps* of his Plato printed in Florence.⁴ Far from being a coincidence, the simultaneous achievement of a major philosophical book and of a major technical work, in the same place and in the same milieu, was attended by both astrological and mythical connotations. In Ficino's mind at least, the publication of *Plato latinus*—and hence also the *ritorno di Platone* to the western world—was timed to take place under the influence of 'good stars'.⁵ Also, according to astronomers, 1484 marked the beginning of an important astrological turning point.⁶ The appearance, then, of a multi-zodiac clock during the same year, in the *bottega* of Lorenzo della Volpaia—a builder of astrolabes and armillary spheres who was well-known in the city—was not accidental. The machine had primarily astrological functions, such as the zodiacal computation of ascendants, of grand conjunctions and of individual horoscopes, a fact usually neglected by historians of science. Moreover, the fame of its clock-maker rested, in Poliziano's eyes, on the fact that he was an *Archimedes redivivus*:

In fact, though I once read that Archimedes of Syracuse had made such a thing, I had my doubts, even with such a great inventor; but our man here has quite dispelled them.⁷

A single identical idea of renewal runs through the *ritorno di Platone* and the *ritorno di Archimede*. It is therefore instructive to explore certain affinities between this letter and the magico-astrological tenets of Ficino in the late 1480s.

See Appendix. On Lorenzo della Volpaia see the articles by P. N. Pagliara in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, XXXVII (1989), pp. 789–90; 799–802, s.v. Della Volpaia; Poulle, *Les Instruments*, I, pp. 653–54, with a short bibliography.

⁴ P. O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2 vols, Florence, 1937; repr. Florence, 1973, I, pp. lx–lxi, item fl.

⁵ For the coincidence of the printing with a great conjunction, see M. Ficino, *Lettere. Epistolarum familiarium liber I*, ed. by S. Gentile, Florence, 1990, p. xli.

⁶ A. Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten* (1920), in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by G. Bing, 2 vols, Leipzig and Berlin, 1932, II, p. 514, now in the Italian version, followed here, *La rinascita del paganesimo antico: contributi alla storia della cultura*, Florence, 1966; repr. 1996, pp. 341, 352.

⁷ 'atque adeo cum legerem aliquando tale quiddam fabricatum Archimedes Syracusanum, vacillabat etiam in tanto autore fides, quam plane hic noster absolvit.' See Appendix.

In della Volpaia's automaton Poliziano saw a reminder of early Greek technology and science. Setting a contemporary clock within the Archimedean tradition was the result of obvious classical reminiscences.⁸ These reminiscences are inseparable from two *loci* in Ficino's *Theologia Platonica*, where Archimedes received a Platonic and Hermetic consecration. More than ten years before Poliziano's letter, the author of the *Theologia Platonica*, in Book XIII, chs 2 and 3, had significantly placed Archimedes's portrait in his gallery of epoptic minds,⁹ those whose intellective powers are endowed with effective creativity and can produce works like the *sphaera mundi* in question. As a philosopher and as an artist, Archimedes—the Greek creator of *sphaeropoiesis*—represented for Ficino the perfect example of those wise men who concentrate their minds upon the temple of God, that is, the fabric of the world: 'templum Dei, mundi scilicet machinam'.¹⁰ Escaping their earthly condition, they could explore the divine temple, the *aedes divina* of the cosmic soul, through *vacatio animae*, a prophetic flight of the soul described in the writings of Hermes Trismegistus during rapture (*raptus*) and divination through dreams (*divinatio per somnium*).¹¹

In these years Ficino and Poliziano are alike in paying the same close attention to highly technical matters, though Marsilio does so in a more magical context. However, it is striking to note that in one of his *Miscellanea* entitled *Automaton legendum in Suetonio*, Poliziano expresses curiosity about the secret life of automata:

⁸ On Archimedes's *sphaeropoiesis* and its Ciceronian tradition, see Poulle, *Les Instruments*, I, pp. 495–96, with bibliography. Cicero mentions Archimedes's sphere in *Tusculan Disputations*, I.xxv.63, *De re publica*, I.14 and *De natura deorum*, II.xxxv–xxxviii.88–98. Other references not mentioned by Poulle are to be found in Ovid, *Fasti*, VI.263–83; Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones*, II.5 (see below, n. 19); Claudian, *Shorter Poems*, 'On Archimedes's sphere'; Proclus, *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, I.13. For Cicero and Archimedes, see now A. Novara, 'Cicéron et le Planétaire d'Archimède', in *Les Astres: Actes du Colloque international de Montpellier, 23–25 mars 1995*, ed. by B. Bakhouché, A. Moreau, J.-C. Turpin, 2 vols, Montpellier, 1996, II, pp. 227–44.

⁹ An epopt is a 'beholder', a person fully initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

¹⁰ M. Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne de l'immortalité des âmes*, ed. and tr. by R. Marcel, 3 vols, Paris, 1964–70, II, p. 216. The term *mundi machina* in Ficino is very likely to derive from Chalcidius; see Plato, *Timaeus a Calcidio translatus commentarioque instructus*, ed. by J. H. Waszink and P. J. Jensen, London and Leiden, 1962, pp. 25.7, 36.18.

¹¹ Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne*, ed. Marcel, II, p. 218: 'Hac divinatione polluit Mercurius Trismegistus.'

It appears, then, that the things generally known as 'automata' were so fashioned by craftsmen as to appear to bring about effects spontaneously and with no apparent cause, as clocks nowadays or some sort of revolving mechanism where we wonder at little images playfully rushed about by a hidden force.¹²

No doubt this mention of clocks among other automatic marvels reflects the high technical achievements of such as Lorenzo della Volpaia and his workshop. Poliziano goes beyond the classical precedents of Lactantius and Cicero in alluding to accomplishments that had actually been realized during the late Trecento and Quattrocento in Italy; for example, those of Giovanni Dondi,¹³ Brunelleschi¹⁴ or the young Leonardo da Vinci, himself acquainted with della Volpaia.

In the second place the hidden cause (*ignara causa*) that gives motion to the mechanism betrays a wider interest in the manifestation of an occult force (*occulta vis*) mysteriously transferred from natural to artificial objects. Transferring forces from nature to human activities in general is by no means incompatible with a certain type of magic that was cautiously explored and exploited by Ficino in his writings. To a mentality receptive to progress in technical skills, as was the case with the humanists, a transfer of this sort could sometimes make the magical arts acceptable in some Italian and Jewish circles.¹⁵ Though he was a poet, Poliziano, who had been instructed in astronomy by Ficino himself,¹⁶ nevertheless mirrored a more general mood and could not avoid the metaphysical implications of the objects of his wonder. To give some instances of the subtle connection between technological 'marvels' and mystical 'powers' unfolding themselves in

¹² 'Apparet ergo Automata appellari solita quae ita mechanici fabricabantur ut sua sponte efficere quippiam velut ignara causa viderentur. Qualia nunc aut horologia sunt, aut versatiles quaequam machinae, in quibus imagunculas, occulta vi, cursitantes ludibundasque miramur.' Poliziano, *Liber Miscellaneorum*, cap. lxxxvii (*Opera*, sig. I8v).

¹³ See, for example, S. A. Bedini and F. R. Maddison, 'Mechanical Universe. The Astrarium of Giovanni de' Dondi', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s., 56/5 (1966), pp. 3-69.

¹⁴ E. Battisti, *Filippo Brunelleschi*, Milan, 1976, pp. 300-07, and Mario Fondelli, 'Un "oriuolo" di Filippo di ser Brunellesco Lippi a Scarperia', *Critica d'arte*, 8a ser., anno 62, no. 4 (dic. 1999), pp. 26-37.

¹⁵ See the important statements of Moshe Idel about Yohanan Alemanno's claims in 'Magic Temples and Cities in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 3 (1981-82), pp. 185-89, at p. 187.

¹⁶ As reported in his *Elegia VIII*: see I. Maïer, *Ange Politien. La formation d'un poète humaniste (1469-1480)*, Geneva, 1966, pp. 35-36, 80-81.

artificial objects, we do not need to go much beyond our present examples.

Nobody has yet seriously explored the legacy of Poliziano's letters.¹⁷ It is noteworthy, however, that the very letter to della Casa about della Volpaia's clock was published several decades later by Josse Bade alongside a lengthy commentary by François Du Bois (alias Franciscus Sylvius, bishop of Tournais, who died around 1530), in 1517, 1520 and again in 1526.¹⁸ In his meticulous description Sylvius does not always probe very deeply into the mechanical structure of the clock, but for our purposes the important point is his reference to Archimedes.

Of the divine character of Archimedes, which could also be applied to Lorenzo della Volpaia and his work, Sylvius had no doubt and, anxious to confirm Poliziano's claims, invoked an excerpt from Lactantius:

'Archimedes made such a thing', etc. Lactantius refers to this device of Archimedes in Bk 2, ch. 5. Undoubtedly God, the framer of the universe (he says), so arranged and contrived [the stars], that they might run through their courses in the heavens with a divine and wonderful order, to accomplish the variations of the successive seasons. Was Archimedes of Sicily not able to contrive a likeness and representation of the universe in hollow brass...? Was it then impossible for God to plan and create the originals, when the skill of man was able to represent them by imitation?¹⁹

¹⁷ M. Martelli, 'Il "Libro delle epistole" di Angelo Poliziano', *Interpres*, 1 (1978), pp. 184–255; at p. 250, n. 46, has only a brief mention of Poliziano's answer to della Casa, erroneously dated there 8 August 1493 (an error repeated in Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano, Storia e Metastoria*, Lecce, 1995, p. 219). For the correct dating (but with another mistake, *ep.* VI.8 for IV.8), see Maier, *Angé Politien*, p. 425.

¹⁸ Ph. Renouard et al., *Imprimeurs et libraires parisiens du XVI^e siècle*, vol. 1–, Paris, 1964–, II (1969), p. 232, no. 562.

¹⁹ 'Tale quiddam fabricatum Archimedes' et caetera. Lactantius capite quinto libri secundi super hac Archimedis machina meminit. Nimirum (inquit) deus universi artifex sic illa disposuit, sic machinatus est, ut per spatia caeli divina et admirabili ratione decurrerent, ad efficiendas succedentium sibi temporum varietates. An Archimedes sculus concavo aere similitudinem mundi ac figuram potuit machinari... Deus ergo illa vera non potuit machinari et efficere, quae potuit solertia hominis imitatione simulare?' The text here is quoted from *Illustrium virorum Epistolae ab Angelo Politiano partim scriptae partim collectae cum Sylvanis Commentarijs et Ascensianis Scholijs: non parum auctis*, [Paris], Jean Petit, n.d., fol. lxxxix. This edition is presumably datable to April 1526 since the prefatory letter of Du Bois to Eustache De Croy, bishop of Arras ('Franciscus Sylvius Eustathio Croyo Attrebatensium') is subscribed 'Vijj calend. Maij M.D.XXVJ Parisiis'. It was a reprint of Badius's now exhausted edition, as appears from Du Bois's words to De Croy: 'Proximis his mensibus, horis (quantam per occupationes licebat) successivis, relegi commentarios eos,

All agree that the image of God as an artist (*divinus artifex*) was emphasized by many classical authors from Plato²⁰ to Proclus.²¹ Lactantius's Christianized version, however, offered a pattern of likeness based on strict semantic and ontological divisions between the true model (*verum exemplum*) of the divine world and the artificial *imitatio* of simulated artefacts (*illa vera . . . quae potuit solertia hominis imitatione simulare*). Yet if textual choices reflect conceptual choices, and we think they do, it is all the more striking that neither Poliziano nor Ficino insisted on this side of the question, that is, on the potential inferiority of any artificial wonder before its divine model. Poliziano's description of Lorenzo's work sets a different tone. For him, not only was Lorenzo della Volpaia a reborn Archimedes, but a true messenger of heaven (*sicut caelitus dimissus*). All the more arresting is the reassertion of his celestial nature with a purely Ficinian touch: 'we might think he learned to understand the heavens in heaven itself'.²² We must remember that the next account of Lorenzo della Volpaia does not occur until five years later, and is in Ficino's *De vita coelitus comparanda*.²³ There is clearly something new here which has not been investigated hitherto, the idea of the artist as a celestial messenger. In other words, medieval notions of artistic skill from Albertus Magnus²⁴ to Dante²⁵ and Boccaccio²⁶ depended on influences exerted by the stars on great artists and heroes, whereas Ficino's notion represents a subtle transition in the direction of the 'starry messenger' (*sidereus nuncius*) celebrated by Tommaso Campanella.²⁷

quos in illustrium virorum epistolas scripseram, propterea quod Badius (apud quem exempla nulla erant reliqua) denuo impressurus erat.' For Lactantius, see *Divinae institutiones*, II.5.17–19, ed. by P. Monat, Paris, 1987, pp. 76–79.

²⁰ Cicero's fascination with Archimedes in the *Tusculan Disputations* takes place in this very context: 'Archimedes fastened on a globe the movements of moon, sun and five wandering stars . . . just like Plato's God who built the world in the *Timaeus* . . .', *Tusculan Disputations*, I.xv.63, tr. by J. E. King, Loeb edition, 1971, p. 74. For Plato's God in *Timaeus*, see F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato Translated with a Running Commentary*, London and New York, 1937, pp. 34–40.

²¹ Proclus, *In Timaeum*, ed. Diehl, III.144.22–33 (on demiurgical *mechané*).

²² 'et in caelo ipso caelum didicisse existimemus'; see Appendix.

²³ An occurrence that has not been noted by modern historians of armillaries and automata.

²⁴ See P. Zambelli, *The Speculum Astronomiae and its Enigma. Astrology, Theology and Science in Albertus Magnus and his Contemporaries*, Dordrecht and Boston, 1992, p. 180.

²⁵ Dante, *Opere minori*, Volume II, part II, *Convivio*, ed. by C. Vasoli and D. De Robertis, Milan and Naples, 1995, pp. 754–63 at pp. 758 n. 4, 759, 760.

²⁶ G. Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia*, ed. by G. Padoan, Milan, 1965, repr. 1994, Canto I (2), *Esposizione allegorica*, 14, pp. 56–57.

²⁷ Striking analogies with Ficino's theory and Poliziano's words are expressed by

Poliziano had good reasons for glorifying a builder of celestial spheres since he found an excellent model in Ficino himself, the admirer of any manifestation of celestial arts. To what extent the glorification, or rather divinization, of an artist like Lorenzo is pure rhetoric and to what extent it verges on true demiurgic appraisal is hard to say in any other context, but not in Ficino's writings.

That Ficino, and Poliziano in a lesser measure, did not think along the same lines as Lactantius should be obvious. Lactantius's definition of God as the supreme artist and author of this world deprived man-made engines of their demiurgical aspects. Ficino, and Poliziano after him, were fascinated by the inverse side of the artist-God analogy. The supreme artist is he who by inspiration, learning and mastery succeeds in gaining immortality because of his divine *ingenium*. This is the reason why, in Ficino's words, nobody could understand how Archimedes fashioned a sphere of bronze and how he gave it the very motion of the skies 'unless he were granted the same genius'. And again, when a man is able to see the heavenly order that transmits motion to the sky, who would not equate his genius with the creator of the heavens (*auctor caelorum*) himself?²⁸ The extraordinary nature of this genius recalls Cicero's enthusiasm for Archimedes's sphere when it was brought to Rome by Marcellus. In fact, in considering the faculty of invention as one of the proofs of the immortality of the soul, Ficino was following Cicero. We probably err, however, if we extend his influence to the whole passage. The argument for the impossibility of celestial motion without God (*feri sine deo non potest*), important for Cicero and for his follower Lactantius, is not central in Ficino's view. In his *Theologia Platonica*, Marsilio demonstrated a wider capacity for philosophical development that

Campanella in his letter to Galileo about *Sidereus nuncius* ('tu caelum ad nos inclinas') and in his *Articuli prophetales* ('mundum videlicet esse in manu Dei quasi horologium'); see G. Ernst, 'From the Watery Trigon to the Fiery Trigon: Celestial Signs, Prophecies and History', in *'Astrologi hallucinati': Stars and the End of the World in Luther's Time*, ed. by P. Zambelli, Berlin and New York, 1986, pp. 265-80, esp. pp. 265 and 270.

²⁸ Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne*, ed. Marcel, II, p. 226: 'Nemo enim discerneret qua via Archimedes sphaeras constituit aeneas eisque motus motibus caelestibus similes tradidit, nisi simili esset ingenio praeditus . . . Cum igitur homo caelorum ordinem unde moveantur, quo progrediantur et quibus mensuris quidve pariant, viderit, quis neget eum esse ingenio, ut ita loquar, paene eodem quo et auctor ille caelorum, ac posse quodammodo caelos facere, si instrumenta nactus fuerit materiamque caelestem . . . ?'

goes far beyond *imitatio dei*. Another idea is here running parallel to the classical *topos* also present in Plutarch, Livy, Pliny, Valerius Maximus and Claudian: the higher products of a creative mind are generated by abstraction; and abstraction is superior to imitation. The portrayal of the mathematician of Syracuse absorbed in the contemplation of geometrical forms (*geometricis figuris intentus*)²⁹ has all the traits of a prophet. Thus separated from the bodily life and concentrated on 'mercurial' faculties, Archimedes's art has prophetic extensions. Measured by non-earthly realities, these extensions are regulated by the universal motion of the *primum mobile* that receives the impulses of the soul of the world. Mechanical considerations apart, it is interesting to note that Sylvius's commentary associates the outer circle of Lorenzo's clock with the *primum mobile*. But interpreting Poliziano's words according to Ficino's *Theologia Platonica*, the hidden power (*occulta vis*) moving multiple heavens is unveiled to Archimedes's mind when it is dominated by Saturn, since a superior insight into the intimate structure of the *aedes divina* is made possible through a particular kind of mathematical rapture.

There is a risk that we might fall into the trap of trying to force Ficino's definition into our own conventional ideas of contemplative Platonism and rational mathematics. Undoubtedly Ficino had a good mathematical background, and could read Archimedes's treatises in the manuscripts of his friend Pierleone Leoni of Spoleto, a key figure for understanding Ficino's excursions into mystical *kyklophoria* (the circular motions of the heavenly spheres) and theurgical practices.³⁰ His interest in geometry was speculative, not demonstrative, sustained as it was by his readings in Plato, Iamblichus, Theon, Nicomachus, Proclus, Chalcidius, Boethius, and most probably too in Arab and medieval authors (Alhazen, Avicenna, Al-Kindi, Grosseteste, Bradwardine, Dagomari) and, possibly, in the great Cusanus himself,³¹ not to mention his familiarity with Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli and Antonio Manetti. He knew that Archimedes was not a mere legendary figure. Moreover, his acquaintance with qualified clockmakers

²⁹ Ibid., II, p. 201.

³⁰ G. Radetti, 'Un'aggiunta alla biblioteca di Pierleone Leoni da Spoleto', *Rinascimento*, 2a ser., 5 (1965), pp. 87–99, at p. 92.

³¹ For Ficino's mathematical learning, see Michael J. B. Allen, *Nuptial Arithmetic: Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on the Fatal Number in Book VIII of Plato's 'Republic'*, Berkeley etc., 1994, and idem, 'Marsilio Ficino, Daemonic Mathematics and the Hypotenuse

such as the della Volpaia convinced him, probably from 1484, that an artificial machine could reproduce the internal motion of the *primum mobile* infused by the *anima mundi*.

As a consequence, two other important points emerge. Firstly, the traditionally ambiguous nature of the *mechanemata* as 'adulterous' tricks (*moecharia*), the very opposite of contemplative mathematics, is resolved with this *Florentina machina* (as Ficino once called the *astrarium*). He had his own way of thinking of *mechanemata* as a Hermetic or 'mercurial' means of ruling over the material world through a descent of the precise calculation of numbers (*subtilis computatio numerorum*) into bodily forms. Hence his stress upon *horologia* in the *Theologia Platonica* and later on in *De vita*. That such a mental shift should be considered the outcome of Ficino's attempt to reconcile mechanics with the liberal arts (*praxis* with *poiesis*) is beyond dispute. As a matter of fact Archimedes's *vacatio* coincides perfectly with Archimedes's *inventio*. In della Volpaia's clock as well, contemplation and motion come to a point of union. In other words Ficino absorbed the two traditions of portraying Archimedes represented by Plutarch's *Vita Marcelli* (14–15) and by Vitruvius's *De architectura* (I.1). While the *pythagoricus homo* and the *organicus homo* often conflicted, in his original brand of Platonism the artist of the ancient world caught up by the ecstatic contemplation of the Muses (*mousoleptos*) and the practical craftsman (*technites*) are fully reconciled.³²

Secondly, moving from the Archimedean myth to its philosophical influence on Ficino's thought in the period 1474–92, there is no evidence that Marsilio the Platonist was aloof, haughtily contemplative, far from the artists and from their technical achievements.³³ Unless we can think of Neoplatonism as a whole as much more complex than our scholarly interpretations generally allow, we shall not perceive the unity of Ficino's work.³⁴ Those of his qualities

of the Spirit', in *Natural Particulars: Nature and the Disciplines in Renaissance Europe*, ed. by A. Grafton and N. Siraisi, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1999, pp. 121–37; see also now S. Toussaint, 'Mystische Geometrie und Hermetismus in der Renaissance: Ficinus und Cusanus', *Perspektiven der Philosophie, Neues Jahrbuch*, 26 (2000), pp. 339–56.

³² These traditions are thoroughly explored by G. Cambiano, 'Alle origini della meccanica: Archimede e Archita', *Arachne. A Journal of Ancient Literature and History on the Web*, issue 2.1, www.cisi.unito.it/arachne/-num4/cambiano.html (15 pages); on Archimedes 'Platonicus', see A. Virieux-Raymond, 'Le platonisme d'Archimède', *Revue philosophique*, 104 (1979), pp. 189–92.

³³ See also the contribution of Francis Ames-Lewis in this volume.

³⁴ E. Garin, *Umanisti, artisti, scienziati*, Rome, 1989, p. 124.

that stem from Plotinian contemplative philosophy do not eclipse other qualities that stem from Hermetic rituals and technical science. Some recent comments upon the masterly book of André Chastel, *Marsile Ficin et l'art*, reprinted in 1996, are telling in this regard. The author of the preface wrote that if ever Ficino's Platonic philosophy and the arts had something in common, only some obscure 'magical' clock could tell us why. But it is clear that the writer had no knowledge of a clock of this kind. Prejudices that militate against an appreciation of Ficino's integrated philosophical thinking depend partly on misreadings of his work, partly on an unintegrated view of his complex mixture of technological magic (such as the animation of statues in *Asclepius*), astrological paraphernalia (such as talismanic devices) and higher mystical concerns. Much of the evidence, however, relating to mechanical, mystical and 'modern' magic within humanist circles (including Bessarion,³⁵ Poliziano, Ficino, Valori and the della Volpaia) can direct us towards new lines of research. Technically speaking, Ficino was far from naïve and the very idea of a *machina mundi* coupled with a *mens fabricans*,³⁶ which arose from his metaphysical and cosmological arguments, turned out to be a continuing concern. How he arranged his thought, with a certain emphasis on the idea of the machine (a point scarcely noticed by scholarship), was subject to numerous factors: his antique and medieval sources, his magical interests and his interest in contemporary craftsmanship. But it should in any case not be understated.

We find a consistent link between Book VI of the *Theologia Platonica* and a famous letter to the mathematician and astrologer Paul of Middleburg, dated 16 September 1492. In this letter, striking praise of a Florentine astronomical clock appears alongside praise of other golden age achievements that struck Ficino in his later years (*laudes saeculi nostri tamquam aurei*).³⁷ Yet such eulogy of clockwork and other technical inventions had been foreshadowed in a page of *Theologia Platonica*, VI.9, which is imbued with a pre-Cartesian spirit, where the power of the embodied soul (*virtus animae*) is compared to a

³⁵ A. Rigo, 'Gli interessi astronomici del cardinale Bessarione', in *Bessarione e l'Umanesimo*, ed. by G. Fiaccadori, Naples, 1994, pp. 105–17, esp. p. 110.

³⁶ Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne*, ed. Marcel, II, p. 59.

³⁷ Marsilii Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basel, 1576; most recently reprinted under the auspices of the Société Marsile Ficin, with a preface by S. Toussaint, Paris, 2000, p. 944: 'ut praetermittam machinam Florentinam, quotidianos coelestium motus agentem'; A. Chastel, *Marsile Ficin et l'art*, Geneva and Lille, 1954; repr. Geneva, 1996, pp. 19–20, n. 38.

mechanical balance 'ruling, moving and making the clock chime'.³⁸ The Ficinian *temperantia* of the human soul is just a small part of a universal balance, within a cosmic frame, animated by the attracting forces of the *anima mundi*. This is the 'wonderful order' best represented by clockwork. Mechanical mysticism would be an appropriate name for it. Its overall pattern derives from medieval literature. For example, the clock is the basic metaphor of Henricus Suso's *Horloge de sapience*,³⁹ a fourteenth-century treatise widely diffused in Europe during the Quattrocento. The *Horloge de sapience* rests on the assumption that a body requires a proper regulation (*temperantia*), which is given by the divine clockmaker to the world. Suso's mechanism has a chime as does the clock in the *Theologia Platonica* where *temperantia*, a constant concern throughout Ficino's work, is the essential activity of the soul, cosmic as well as individual.⁴⁰

Thus in the last quarter of the fifteenth century Ficino reinforced the old mechanical analogy as a result of his direct contact with pioneering models of zodiacal clocks that were leading him directly towards a non-static concept of the mechanization of the world. For many reasons the word 'mechanicism', an expression more appropriate to the seventeenth century, usually excludes any form of magical *machina mundi* as being extraneous to the New Science. However if a valid criterion for mechanicism involves a kinetic image of the universe based on the immanent dynamism of the heavens, in which the divine model and the man-made image conflate in a unique paradigm,⁴¹ then Ficino's theory should be considered as a forerunner of

³⁸ Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne*, ed. Marcel, I, p. 248: 'Animae virtus in corpore idem ferme est quod . . . vis magnetis in ferro . . . vel temperatio artis in horologio quod inde ordine mirabili regitur, movetur, sonat.' Elsewhere Ficino refers to the power of the magnet to move iron as being sometimes a hidden force. See *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, 6 vols to date, London, 1975-, VI, p. 58.

³⁹ H. Michel, 'L'Horloge de Sapience et l'histoire de l'horlogerie', *Physis*, 3 (1961), pp. 291-98; E. P. Spencer, 'L'Horloge de Sapience. Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale, ms. IV, 111', *Scriptorium*, 17 (1963), pp. 277-99, esp. pp. 277-79, 282-83: 'une horloge de très noble forme dont les roues estoient excellentes et les cloches doucement sonnans . . .'

⁴⁰ Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne*, ed. Marcel, II, p. 61: 'cum vero tanta sit et tam sublimis nostri corporis moderatio ut caeli temperantiam imitetur'; but see also L. White, Jr., 'The Iconography of *Temperantia* and the Virtuousness of Technology', in *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe. Essays in Memory of E. H. Harbison*, ed. by T. K. Rabb and J. E. Seigel, Princeton, 1969, pp. 197-219 (pp. 211-16 and figs 7-10).

⁴¹ On clockwork paradigms in the Middle Ages and seventeenth century, see

Cartesian thinking. Unless we define mechanicism very narrowly, Ficino's theory of planetary orbits moved by a rational soul (*rationalis anima*) through a vivifying movement (*motus vitalis vivificusque*) which is purely internal (*non enim fons motionis aliunde movetur*)⁴² does not contradict the demands of a mechanistic explanation of intrinsic motion.

In this light, recollecting the arguments in Poliziano's letter, the congruence of the zodiacal clock with the *ratio caeli* means simply that its larger circle (*summum versatilis orbis*) revolves in harmony with the invisible movement of the *primum mobile* through concealed cog-wheels (*rotulis intrinsecus denticulatis*).⁴³ If he knew of this letter, and we think he surely did, Ficino would have agreed with Poliziano that the superiority of Lorenzo's zodiacal automaton consisted in its circular conformity with the sky. Incorporating the congruence that exists between microcosm and macrocosm within a machine presents essentially a double magical character: it links a man-made *figura mundi* to the universal soul, and it reformulates *maritare mundum*, the magical motto linking the superior world with the inferior world, under a new form of modern artifice that enabled the *sapiens* actively to re-establish the balance between divine and human forces. Otherwise Ficino would not have discussed the planetarium in the third, 'magic' book of his *De vita* (*De vita coelitus comparanda*) ch. 19 of which is precisely about Lorenzo della Volpaia's sphere. In doing so, he also strongly validated a tradition which was to survive until the seventeenth century in the *Magia thaumaturga* of Gaspar Schott.⁴⁴

As scholars have observed, there are many obscurities in the short, enigmatic description of the automatic planetary clock mentioned in *De vita*, III.19.44–54: 'But it will be useful to look at a sphere equipped with its own motions; Archimedes once constructed one and a

A. Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the XVIIIth Century*, Princeton, 1986, pp. 322–24.

⁴² *Théologie platonicienne*, V.1 (ed. Marcel, I, p. 175).

⁴³ The medieval metaphor that universal order is best represented by the *congruentia* of a machine is rather different. It is exemplified in Roger Bacon's *Questiones supra libros quatuor physicorum*. What Poliziano calls here *congruens* is the motion of Lorenzo's *astrarium* with the *ratio caeli* because it follows the course of the stars (*siderum cursus*).

⁴⁴ G. Schott, *Magia universalis naturae et artis, sive Recondita naturalium et artificialium rerum scientia, opus quadripartitum*, 4 parts, Würzburg, 1657–59, pars III, lib. III, caput secundum, *De variis machinis per rotas dentatas, Magia thaumaturga*, pp. 260–77. See esp. Machina III, *Sphaerae aliaequae machinae siderum motus varios exhibentes*; Machina IV, *Archimedeaea Sphaera*; and Machina VII, *Horologia rotata*.

Florentine friend of ours named Lorenzo did so just recently . . .⁴⁵ I have tried to resolve these difficulties elsewhere by looking at evidence collected from Florentine documents hitherto unexplored in Ficinian studies.⁴⁶ Suffice it to say here that in my belief the clock described by Poliziano in 1484 is connected to the other zodiacal machine first described by Ficino during the summer of 1489 in the *De vita* passage. The latter device must have been a flat multiple-zodiac clock newly equipped with two outer spheres, the earth (*Ceres* or *Vesta*) and the golden constellations (*aurea sidera*). It thus demonstrates a greater familiarity with craftsmanship on Ficino's part than we might have expected. It is also possible that the clock described there might have been an innovative early model for the so-called 'Clock of the Planets' of Lorenzo della Volpaia, which was not realized until 1510.⁴⁷

A mechanical prototype, reflecting the panoply of Ficino's later cosmological and magical tenets, is thus at the centre of *De vita*, III.19. This is not surprising since Ficino came into contact with della Volpaia, who was also a very well trained astrologer, thanks to his friend Filippo Valori, who financed the publication of *De vita*. Like the 1484 multiple-zodiac clock with its flat dial (*planus orbis*, see Fig. 3), this one had its mathematical basis in the Ptolemaic *Theorica Planetarum* of Andalò di Negro, an author well known in Ficino's circle by humanists such as Antonio di Tuccio Manetti and Paolo

⁴⁵ 'Utile vero fore spectare spheram motibus suis praeditam, qualem Archimedes quondam et nuper Florentinus quidam noster, Laurentius nomine, fabricavit.' The passage begins, 'They think it worthwhile to add to the spheres, for a true imitation of the heavens, golden stars, and to clothe Vesta herself or Ceres, that is earth, with a green garment . . . But it will be useful to look at a sphere equipped with its own motions . . .', Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed. and tr. by C. V. Kaske and J. R. Clark, Binghamton, NY, 1989, pp. 346 (text) and 451, n. 6 (commentary).

⁴⁶ S. Toussaint, 'Un'orologio per il *De vita*. Nuove prospettive ficiniane', in *Marsilio Ficino. Fonti, testi, fortuna*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, Firenze, 1-3 ottobre 1999, forthcoming; and idem, *Marsilio Ficino, L'Inspiré*, forthcoming.

⁴⁷ For the della Volpaia and the 'Clock of The Planets', recently rebuilt by G. Brusa, A. Gorla and E. Pouille, and currently at the Museo di Storia della Scienza di Firenze, see G. Brusa, *L'Orologio dei Pianeti di Lorenzo della Volpaia*, a guide to the clock, Museo di Storia della Scienza, Florence, n.d.; C. Maccagni, 'The Florentine Clock and Instrument-Makers of the Della Volpaia Family', in *Histoire des instruments scientifiques*, XII^e Congrès International d'Histoire des Sciences, Paris 1968, Paris, 1971, pp. 65-73; M. Miniati, 'Un nuovo orologio notturno', *Nuncius*, 7 (1992), pp. 115-17; G. Brusa, 'L'Orologio dei Pianeti di Lorenzo della Volpaia', *Nuncius*, 9 (1994), pp. 645-69.

Toscanelli.⁴⁸ Yet the astrological purposes of the machine in no way contradict its scientific conception. This emerges quite unequivocally from the documents. Moreover two concordant descriptions in an Antinori manuscript⁴⁹ and in a manuscript of the Fondo Magliabechiano⁵⁰ prove that when he was in Rome in 1489 Lorenzo della Volpaia at first meant his clock to be built for King Matthias Corvinus, whose patronage was invoked at the beginning of *De vita coelitus comparanda*. In fact, in examining the two copies of Lorenzo della Volpaia's diary made by his sons, Benvenuto, Frosino and Girolamo, in the Antinori and Magliabechiano manuscripts, it is clear to us, as it is to our colleague Prof. Giuseppe Brusa, that Lorenzo de' Medici, *il Magnifico*, never possessed the 'Clock of the Planets', although its mistaken attribution to him is echoed by many distinguished scholars including Chastel, Yates and Poule. What matters most, and constitutes a real novelty, is the involvement of Ficino in the project, which is supported by philological, personal and chronological connections.

Let us examine these aspects of the *De vita coelitus comparanda* more closely. This book presents a considerable challenge for modern scholarship in that it calls for a framework of magical theory. The well known and all too often divergent trends of interpretation represented by Plotinian and Asclepian magic, associated with natural and daemonic rituals respectively, are both nevertheless limited to the area of the ancient Neoplatonic and Hermetic traditions.⁵¹ The general drift of such interpretations can be summarized as the conviction

⁴⁸ S. Toussaint, *De l'Enfer à la Coupole: Dante, Brunelleschi, Ficino. A propos des 'codici Caetani di Dante'*, Rome, 1997, pp. 71 and 78, n. 43.

⁴⁹ Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Antinori 17 (late 15th–16th century), fol. 73v.

⁵⁰ Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Magliabechi, XIX 90, fols 1r–6v. There is an unpublished transcription by Prof. C. Pedretti. For full analysis and commentaries of both MSS see my forthcoming essays mentioned in n. 46 above.

⁵¹ Modern interpretations of the third book of *De vita* were chiefly focused on the *Asclepius* (Yates) and Plotinus's *Enneads*, IV.3.11 (Kristeller) or IV.4.26 (Walker) until Sebastiano Gentile's recent penetrating analysis in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Ermete Trismegisto. Marsilio Ficino and the Return of Hermes Trismegistus*, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana exhibition catalogue, Florence, 1999, pp. 104–06, no. XXIX. For many other questions relating to Ficino's sources, see B. Copenhaver, 'Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in the *De vita* of Marsilio Ficino', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 37 (1984), pp. 523–54; idem, 'Renaissance Magic and Neoplatonic Philosophy: *Ennead* 4, 3–5 in Ficino's *De vita coelitus comparanda*', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Studi e documenti*, ed. by G. C. Garfagnini, 2 vols, Florence, 1986, II, pp. 351–69. See also P. Zambelli, *L'ambigua natura della magia: filosofi, streghe, riti nel Rinascimento*, Milan, 1991, pp. 24–52.

that the examples adduced in *De vita*, III.19, namely the clock and the painting, are no more than 'images . . . , artistic embodiments of the Platonic notion'.⁵² But let us now consider the evidence for a reading that does justice to Ficino's greater intellectual range. Images do not have inner motions. Yet motions, that is celestial revolutions and *circular movements*, are focal points in Ficino's *De vita*, including the theurgical activities inspired by Chaldean and Arabo-Hebraic sources.⁵³ Does Frances Yates in her section on 'Ficino's Natural Magic' introduce an important qualification to Chastel's thesis⁵⁴ with her own hypothesis of 'an elaborate jewel'?⁵⁵ Her confession that 'there is a good deal which I have not been able to understand in this description' betrays a failure to grasp Ficino's real intentions. The idea that Marsilio could nourish a deep philosophical interest in a zodiacal clock held little attraction for scholars steeped in Plotinus or the *Picatrix*, neither of whom mention mechanical magic. In a word, Ficino has moved beyond these texts to a totally new kind of talismanic project. Bearing in mind that Ficino's attention was not necessarily directed where our own criteria might suppose, the figure of della Volpaia fitted his purpose more closely than Botticelli or Ghirlandaio would have done, for several reasons. This is immediately clear if we consider that della Volpaia's 'Clock of the Planets' answered the expectations expressed earlier by Ficino in Book XIII of *Theologia Platonica*, concerning the immortality of the soul, one of his principal themes: with a celestial instrument at mankind's command, and with an artist of 'genius' experiencing Archimedes's *vacatio*, humanity could lay claim to attaining divinity. The clock in a sense offered both 'instrument' and 'rapture'⁵⁶ as a miniaturized model of the animated sky, and thus provided a highly favourable vehicle for the ecstatic contemplation of the world soul.

Such a 'machine for rapture' was also compatible with the further less obvious goals of Hermetic and daemonic prophecy. During

⁵² Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed. Kaske and Clark, p. 451.

⁵³ S. Toussaint, 'Ficino's Orphic Magic or Jewish Astrology and Oriental Philosophy? A Note on *spiritus*, Three Books on Life, Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Zarza', *Accademia. Revue de la Société Marsile Ficin*, 2 (2000), pp. 19–31.

⁵⁴ Chastel, *Marsile Ficin*, pp. 95–96.

⁵⁵ F. Yates, 'Ficino's Natural Magic', in *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, London, 1964, p. 74.

⁵⁶ For a detailed analysis of Ficino's prophetic thinking, see S. Toussaint, 'L'individuo estatico: Tecniche profetiche in Marsilio Ficino e Giovanni Pico della Mirandola', *Bruniana et Campanelliana*, 6 (2000), pp. 351–79.

the years 1486–90 Ficino had found in Iamblichus's *De mysteriis*, in Porphyry's *De abstinentia*,⁵⁷ and in Synesius's *De somniis*⁵⁸ sources for two of his fundamental doctrines: that the inspiration for mechanical sciences and technical inventions are breathed into men by good *daemones*,⁵⁹ and that the same *daemones* have revealed the signs (*characteres*) and the planetary seals present in the world soul. Perhaps Ficino was thinking of realizing a modern teletic art, emulating the antique animation of statues, in a golden age of his own where a talismanic device would represent and influence the 'spiritus mundi'.⁶⁰ The question is destined to remain unsolved. But we can observe a strong interest in theurgy in the Aldine edition of his later translations, published in 1497, with texts of Iamblichus, Synesius, Porphyry and Proclus.

The question we must now address is whether all this provides a sufficient basis for reconsidering certain aspects of Ficino's role in the Hermetic tradition. Not for nothing did Ficino de-emphasize the passive capture of magic influences and insist instead on a higher level of active prophetic skills. As we have seen, he was aware of the rise of new developments and perhaps also of a new definition of contemporary Hermeticism following the diffusion of his own translations of Hermes. The letter to Paul of Middleburg (1492) may signify that he considered his discovery of new texts, their printed translations (*Platonica disciplina nuper in lucem*), the mechanical inventions of his time, including della Volpaia's clock (*machina florentina*),

⁵⁷ *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Mostra di manoscritti, stampe e documenti, 17 maggio – 16 giugno 1984*, ed. by S. Gentile, S. Niccoli and P. Viti, Florence, 1984, pp. 122–23, no. 95 (Porphyry), and pp. 126–29, no. 98 (Iamblichus).

⁵⁸ For Ficino and Synesius see B. P. Copenhaver, 'Iamblichus, Synesius and the Chaldaean Oracles in Marsilio Ficino's *De Vita Libri Tres*: Hermetic Magic or Neoplatonic Magic?', in *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. by J. Hankins, J. Monfasani and F. Purnell, Jr., Binghamton, NY, 1987, pp. 441–55. But see also M. Y. Perrin, 'Synésios de Cyrène, le sommeil et les rêves dans l'Antiquité tardive', and A. Rabassini, 'Il *De somniis* di Sinesio tradotto da Ficino', both in *Accademia. Revue de la Société Marsile Ficini*, 1 (1999), pp. 141–51, 153–54, together with a facsimile reprint of the 1516 edition of Ficino's translation, pp. 155–69.

⁵⁹ See a remarkable excursus in H. Lewy, *The Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*, rev. edn, Paris, 1978, pp. 500–01. It was possible to combine static figures and dynamic devices, *characteres* and talismanic skills, in such inventions as the Chaldean magical spinning tops called *ύργες*, *ibid.*, pp. 135–37. On Ficino and the *ύργες*, see Copenhaver, 'Iamblichus, Synesius and the Chaldaean Oracles', pp. 447–53, and now for further analysis, Toussaint, 'L'individuo estatico', esp. pp. 371–74 and n. 56.

⁶⁰ D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, London, 1958, pp. 51–53.

together with any form of technical skill, to be similar 'Saturnian' activities under the influence of good *daemones* and benevolent stars.

Certainly his concern with the clock marks an important addition to Marsilio's mental tools. Inverting the usual proportion he had observed earlier in his *Theologia Platonica* between microcosm and macrocosm, Ficino offered the reader of *De vita* the man-made power of embracing the celestial spheres in his own mind and of re-awakening the divine forces of the *anima mundi*. A microcosmic automaton was the first step towards the macrocosmic intelligence of the heavenly life, and towards creating our own heavens.

APPENDIX

Poliziano's Letter

The text of this letter is taken from *Omnia opera Politiani*, Venetiis in aedibus Aldi MIID (1498), *Ep.* IV.8, sig. flr-v.

Angelus Politianus Francisco Casae suo s.d.,

Accepi epistolam tuam, qua mihi significas allatum istuc esse de machinula Automato quae sit nuper a Laurentio quodam Florentino constructa in qua siderum cursus cum caeli ratione congruens explicetur. Aisque te cupere ut, quoniam famae fides derogeretur, ego ad te de ea scribam si quid comperti habeam. Geram tibi morem, et quamvis longo intervallo id opus, ruri agens, haud aspexi, tamen eius vel quae forma sit vel ratio vel usus, quantum consequi memoria poterō, breviter exponam. Quae si tibi explicatio paulo videatur obscurior, non nostrae omnino orationi sed ipsius etiam rei, quale agitur, subtilitati atque adeo novitati velim attribuas.

Columnella est quadrata, quae pyramidos modo in acutum desinens fastigiatur, altitudinis fere trium cubitum. Supra eam pro capitello planus orbis est aheneus auro et coloribus distinctus et in cuius altera parte omnis siderum errantium cursus explicetur, cuius est dimensio cubitali brevior, rotulisque intrinsecus denticulatis agitur, circulo immobili summum complectente marginem quatuor et viginti horarum spatiis distincto. Intraque eum in summo versatili orbe signa duodecim suis discernuntur gradibus.

Interius orbiculi octo pari ferme inter se magnitudine visuntur. Ex iis duo medium obtinent punctum, alter scilicet alteri infixus, sic ut inferior maiusculus solem, superior lunam repraesentet: a sole radius

ad circulum pertingens in ipso quidem horas, in signifero vero mensis dies graduumque numerum verumque et medium (quod aiunt), solis motum pariter indicet. A luna item stilus prodit, ipsius horarum index quae scilicet inferius in limbo ipso maioris orbiculi designantur, perque lunaris epicyclii transiens centrum signiferumque contingens, medium sui sideris declarat motum. Alter [*correxi ex alteri, ed. Aldina*] item indidem exoriens lunarisque centrum corporis hoc est epicyclii oram secans, verum eius locum manifestat. Quo fit ut et tarditas celeritasque et motus cursusque omnis et coitus item pleniluniaeque visantur.

Circum hos orbiculi sex, quorum unus quem Draconis caput caudamque vocant, solis pariter lunaeque defectus insinuat. Reliqui planetis attributi, quorum a singulis binae eminent cuspides motuum indices, perinde atque in luna ostendimus. Sed ei retro quoque gradiuntur, quod nequaquam in luna usu venit, utpote cuius in contrariam feratur epicyclios; ita et coniunctionum et recessuum et latitudinum ratio in singulis manifesta.

Est praeterea limbus alius signiferi instar sex illos quos dixi, planetarum orbiculos superne secans, unde et orientium gradus signorum et dierum spatia hoc est quota sol hora exoriatur apparet. A quibus singuli planetae orbiculis deferuntur, et [*correxi ex ei, ed. Aldina*] vicissim interdium quidem ad orientem, noctu vero ad occasum comitant; contra orbis ipse amplissimus noctu ad orientem, interdium ad occidentem, quatuor et viginti horarum spatio planetas torquet. Quae scilicet omnia cum caelo congruere ipso et ratio convincit et peritissimus quisque consentit.

Nec est quod mireris incredibilia haec videri permultis. Quippe (ut est apud quemdam) 'tarda solet magnis rebus inesse fides'. Vix ipsi, inquam, oculis credimus cum haec cottidie intueamur. Atque adeo cum legerem aliquando tale quiddam fabricatum Archimedes Syracusanum, vacillabat etiam in tanto autore fides, quam plane hic noster absolvit. Et ipso quidem opere laus omnis inferior est neque enim aliter laudari pro dignitate potest, nisi ut omnem illi laudem esse impari fateamur. Ipsum certe artificem dubium est morum ne, et probitatis candorisque et sanctitatis, an ingenii magis causa admiremur, sic ut caelitus demissum et in caelo ipso caelum didicisse existimemus.

Vale. Faesulis VI idus augustas, Mcccclxxxiiii.

Translation

Angelo Poliziano to Francesco della Casa: greetings.

I had your letter where you mention that you have received news of a mechanical automaton recently built by a certain Lorenzo of Florence, which reveals the course of the stars in relation to the structure of the heavens. And you say that since the report beggars belief, you would like me to write if I find out anything about it. I'll do as you ask, and though I haven't set eyes on the work for some time, being in the country, I'll briefly tell you as far as I can recall from memory its appearance, structure and manner of operation. If this account seems a little unclear, please don't put that down entirely to my description but also to the intricacy and indeed the great novelty of the device in question.

The support column is of square section, brought to a point at the top in a sharp angle in the manner of a pyramid, almost three cubits [four-and-a-half feet] high. Above this column, forming a sort of capital, is a flat disc made of bronze picked out in gold and colours; on the other side of it, the whole course of the wandering stars [the planets] is laid out. It measures less than a cubit [one-and-a-half feet] and is moved on the inside by toothed wheels; there is a fixed circle round its outer edge divided into spaces of the twenty-four hours. Within that, at the top of the revolving disc, the twelve signs of the zodiac are set out in their positions.

Inside can be seen eight little discs, all pretty much the same size. Of these, two are fixed to the central point, that is, one is attached to the other, so that the lower one, slightly larger, represents the sun, and the upper one the moon. A spoke extends from the sun to the outer circle and indicates on it the hours and on the zodiac the months, the days and the true number of degrees, as well as the so-called mean path of the sun. A pointer likewise projects from the moon, indicating its phases, which are marked out below on the very edge of the larger [solar] dial; passing through the centre of the lunar epicycle and touching the zodiac, it shows the mean motion of its own star [i.e. the moon]. Another pointer rising from the same place bisects the centre of the lunar body, that is, the edge of the epicycle, and shows the moon's true position [in relation to earth and sun]. So it is that one may see both slowness and swift-

ness, every movement and every path, new moons⁶¹ and full moons.

Around these are six small discs. One, which is called the 'head and tail of the dragon', discloses eclipses of the sun and moon alike. The rest are assigned to the planets, and pairs of pointers project from each of them indicating their motion, as I explained in relation to the moon. But they also move backwards, which is by no means the case with the moon, since its epicycle moves in reverse; in this way the scheme of conjunctions, retrogressions and inclinations⁶² for each planet becomes clear.

There is another additional zodiacal band, like the six I mentioned, which intersects the discs of the planets from above; from this appears the degree of elevation of the [zodiacal] signs and the length of the days, that is, at what hour the sun rises. These drive the individual planets on their discs. They in turn travel by day to the east, by night to the west; the widest disc, on the other hand, turns the planets by night to the east, by day to the west, in the space of twenty-four hours. It is proved by reason, and the experts all agree, that all this corresponds to the heavens themselves.

You shouldn't be surprised that many people find these things unbelievable—indeed, as someone said, 'credence tends to come slowly in important matters'.⁶³ What I mean is that though we see such things every day, we can scarcely believe our own eyes. In fact, though I once read that Archimedes of Syracuse had made such a thing, I had my doubts, even with such a great inventor; but our man here has quite dispelled them. No praise is sufficient for the machine itself: it can only be adequately praised if we admit that no praise can do it justice. As for the craftsman, I don't know whether we should admire him more for his character—his virtue, kindliness and devoutness—or for his genius: such a genius that we might well think he was sent down from heaven and learnt to understand the heavens in heaven itself.

Farewell. Fiesole, 8 August 1484.

⁶¹ Latin *coitus*, but this refers to the conjunction of sun and moon at new moon, and hence to the new moon itself: *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, p. 349, sense 1b.

⁶² *Latitudo*: the number of degrees by which a planet varies from the angle of the sun travelling across the heaven.

⁶³ Ovid, *Heroides*, XVII.130.

NEOPLATONISM AND THE VISUAL ARTS AT THE TIME OF MARSILIO FICINO

Francis Ames-Lewis

Over the past fifty years or so, debate on the issue of the significance of Florentine Neoplatonic philosophy, and of Ficino's philosophical ideas in particular, for the visual arts in his time has primarily revolved around paintings produced for members of the Medici family, and most particularly two of Botticelli's great panel-paintings in the Uffizi, the *Pallas and the Centaur* and the *Primavera*. This debate reached its height around 1960 when Edgar Wind and Erwin Panofsky proposed variations on the classic Neoplatonic reading, Ernst Gombrich's celebrated article of 1945.¹ Gombrich understood the *Primavera* in the light of a letter from Marsilio Ficino to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, second cousin to Lorenzo the Magnificent, in which Venus is equated with the concept of *humanitas*. However, this does not really help to elucidate the meaning of the Venus who stands at the centre of the *Primavera*. Moreover, Gombrich's hypothesis was further compromised by his unsatisfactory attempt to identify the figures and their interrelationships in the light of the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius, which in its somewhat coarse character does not well match the lyrical, pastoral quality of Botticelli's pictorial treatment.

In 1958 Edgar Wind suggested, citing Ficino at frequent intervals, that the two groups on either side of Venus may represent two consecutive phases of one consistent Platonic theory of love.² Since Vasari had seen the *Primavera* and the *Birth of Venus* hanging in the villa of Castello, which then belonged to the heirs of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, Erwin Panofsky proposed in 1960 that they were pendants (despite the fact that one is on panel and the other on canvas), both painted for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, the first

¹ E. H. Gombrich, 'Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of his Circle', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 8 (1945), pp. 7-60; repr. in *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, London, 1972, pp. 31-81.

² E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, London and New Haven, Conn., 1958, p. 110.

showing Natural Venus and the second Celestial Venus.³ At this point, with the authority of Gombrich, Wind and Panofsky behind it, the theory that the two paintings were based on Neoplatonic textual programmes written for Botticelli by Ficino was widely accepted.

However, fashions in interpretation change; and such changes may be stimulated by new evidence becoming available. In 1975 a previously unexplored inventory was published more or less simultaneously, but independently, by John Shearman and Webster Smith.⁴ This inventory, a list of the possessions of Lorenzo and Giovanni di Pierfrancesco de' Medici in 1499, shows that the *Pallas and the Centaur* and the *Primavera* hung not at Castello but in one of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco's rooms in their town house in Florence. Moreover, the 1499 inventory includes no painting that can be identified as the *Birth of Venus*. This then was apparently not a pendant to the *Primavera*; and since it is painted on canvas in relatively inexpensive pigments, especially in comparison with the *Primavera*, it seems likely that it was painted as villa decoration, and not necessarily for the Medici at all. The *Primavera* on the other hand was set into the wainscoting of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco's anteroom, above a fine *lettuccio*, or day-bed. That this painting was made to be seen in association with a piece of high-quality domestic furniture casts it in a rather different light from that in which it was seen at the time when Neoplatonic interpretations of its imagery were most enthusiastically received. Since the publication of the inventory in 1975 there has been a tendency to seek other cultural contexts in which to understand the *Primavera*.

It is true that one recent interpretation of the *Primavera* has once more seen it in the light of Ficinian Neoplatonism. In 1989 Joanne Snow-Smith published a lengthy and complex analysis of the painting that takes as an initial premise that it was Marsilio Ficino who wrote the literary programme for Botticelli to depict.⁵ This programme, Snow-Smith wrote, received its immediate impetus from the Hermetic concept of a visionary revelation of Divine Truth. The purpose of this 'seemingly enigmatic programme' was 'to proffer to

³ E. Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renaissances in Western Art*, Uppsala, 1960, pp. 191–200.

⁴ J. Shearman, 'The Collections of the Younger Branch of the Medici', *Burlington Magazine*, 117 (1975), pp. 12–27; W. Smith, 'On the Original Location of the *Primavera*', *Art Bulletin*, 57 (1975), pp. 31–39.

⁵ J. Snow-Smith, *The Primavera of Sandro Botticelli. A Neoplatonic Interpretation*, New York, 1989.

the cognoscenti four distinct levels of meaning set within the configuration of ostensibly singular inner visions of the journey of the soul to God'. These four levels of meaning are the literal (by which the figures in the painting are identified in the light of classical texts, about which there is no longer any controversy); the allegorical, through which Ficino advocated his theory of Platonic love; the moral, into which Ficino interpolated his doctrine of the immortality of the soul; and finally the anagogical, in which Ficino drew comparisons between the journey of the soul to God and the Christian concept of Last Judgement. To my way of thinking, however, this cumbersome mode of interpretation carries within it the seeds of its own destruction, and frankly does little service to the argument in favour of a Neoplatonic reading of the *Primavera*. In my perception, the picture simply does not *look* like a 'visionary revelation of Divine Truth': its aesthetic character and its domestic function as furniture decoration do not match up with such an esoteric, metaphysical and syncretic programme.

So, in general it may be said that in recent years Neoplatonic interpretations have tended to give way to readings of the *Primavera* that understand it in terms of the Petrarchan poetic culture of Lorenzo the Magnificent's circle. Approaches from this direction were brought together and elaborated in Charles Dempsey's exhaustive analysis of 1992.⁶ He plausibly demonstrated that the *Primavera* is best understood as a visualization of the idealized, courtly love espoused by Lorenzo and his humanist circle. This courtly ideal is celebrated in the poetry of Angelo Poliziano, which manifestly lies behind some specific details of the painting's imagery, and of Lorenzo himself. To be sure, Poliziano's poetry shows his deep responsiveness to Marsilio Ficino's ideas, and Lorenzo's *Comento sopra alcuni de' suoi sonetti* makes

⁶ C. Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love. Botticelli's 'Primavera' and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*, Princeton, 1992. Dempsey's approach is much indebted to those taken by Aby Warburg in his celebrated study *Sandro Botticelli's 'Geburt der Venus' und 'Frühling': Eine Untersuchung über die Vorstellungen von der Antike in der italienischen Frührenaissance*, Hamburg and Leipzig, 1893 (repr. in *Gesammelte Schriften: Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike*, ed. by G. Bing, 2 vols, Leipzig and Berlin, 1932, I, pp. 5–68 and 307–28, and now translated as 'Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and *Spring*: An Examination of Concepts of Antiquity in the Italian Early Renaissance (1893)', in Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, tr. by D. Britt, Los Angeles, 1999, pp. 89–156), and by P. Francastel, 'La Fête mythologique au Quattrocento: Expression littéraire et visualisation plastique', in *Oeuvres II: la réalité figurative: Eléments structurels de sociologie et de l'art*, Paris, 1965, pp. 229–52, and idem, 'Un Mythe poétique et social du Quattrocento: la Primavera', *ibid.*, pp. 253–66.

it abundantly clear that his thought, and not least his philosophy of love, was also profoundly affected by Ficino's Neoplatonism. But in Botticelli's painting these ideas are as it were filtered through that poetry of the Laurentian circle that stands firmly within the tradition of Virgilian and Petrarchan pastoral verse. That the painting's imagery reflects poetic rather than philosophical ideas is in fact hardly surprising. It is well-nigh impossible to recreate Ficino's abstract philosophical concepts, such as those on the theme of *humanitas*, or of divine truth, in visual terms that are both intelligible without a textual gloss and are at the same time pictorially interesting and aesthetically pleasing. Poliziano's *Stanze per la Giostra di Giuliano de' Medici* of 1475, often cited as the text closest in spirit to Botticelli's *Primavera*, is on the other hand full of poetic images that can be transposed directly into visual terms.⁷

In another recent discussion of the *Primavera*, which reflects better the current interpretative preferences, Sharon Fermor also sees it as a poetic painting that resonates with the idealized, chivalric love of the courtly joust; and in her account the name of Marsilio Ficino and the word 'Neoplatonic' fail entirely to appear.⁸ And in an article published as recently as 1999 Charles Dempsey has returned to the issue, adducing further evidence for associating the *Primavera* intimately with Poliziano's *Stanze per la Giostra* in both imagery and date.⁹ He now links them both with the development of the courtly masque in Laurentian Florence in the mid-1470s, a cultural phenomenon that was rudely halted by the disaster of the Pazzi conspiracy and the death of Giuliano de' Medici in late April 1478.

This hypothesis may be strengthened by historical evidence about Lorenzo the Magnificent's relations with Marsilio Ficino. The changing state of this relationship can be symbolically suggested by comparing two groups of portraits. In the group of eminent humanists of the day in the Tornabuoni Chapel *Annunciation to Zacharias*, Ficino appears alongside Poliziano, and with Cristoforo Landino and Gentile de' Becchi.¹⁰ In the Sassetti Chapel *Confirmation of the Rule*, however,

⁷ 'Stanze cominciate per la Giostra di Giuliano de' Medici', in A. Poliziano, *Stanze per la Giostra, Orfeo, Rime: con un'appendice di prose volgari*, ed. by B. Maier, Novara, 1969, pp. 31–92.

⁸ S. Fermor, 'Botticelli and the Medici', in *The Early Medici and their Artists*, ed. by F. Ames-Lewis, London, 1995, pp. 169–85, especially pp. 173–83.

⁹ C. Dempsey, 'Portraits and Masks in the Art of Lorenzo de' Medici, Botticelli and Politian's *Stanze per la Giostra*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 52 (1999), pp. 1–42.

¹⁰ For this, see now R. Kecks, *Ghirlandaio: catalogo completo*, Florence, 1995, pp. 126–44, cat. 15, pls. 74–75.

it is Poliziano alone who is shown in around 1484 closely associated with Lorenzo the Magnificent and his family as he leads Lorenzo's children up the stairs in the front of the scene towards their father.¹¹ About ten years before this group portrait was painted, Lorenzo's relations with Ficino appear to have cooled.¹² Lorenzo joined gatherings of the Platonic Academy in the later 1460s and early 1470s, and he was certainly at that time one of the close followers with whom Ficino discussed his doctrine of Platonic love. It is Ficino who speaks the lengthy discourse on that theme in Lorenzo's *Altercazione* of 1473. But it was also in 1473 that Poliziano joined Lorenzo's household, to become tutor to his children in 1475, the year of the celebrated *Giostra* of Giuliano de' Medici.¹³

Not long after Ficino was ordained in that same year of 1473, Lorenzo obtained two benefices for him; but shortly after this the correspondence between them dried up. Ficino may have been jealous of the increasing intellectual intimacy between Lorenzo and Poliziano. But it has been argued that their growing separation may have been caused by differences in political sympathies, later perhaps exacerbated when friends of Ficino were implicated in the Pazzi conspiracy of 1478.¹⁴ It is suggested that Ficino was unhappy over the increasingly seigneurial position that Lorenzo adopted within Florentine politics and statesmanship. Lorenzo's growing confidence, which was admittedly seriously dented by the events of 1478, may be symbolized in the unprecedented public splendour displayed in the 1475 *Giostra* of Giuliano. It seems improbable in this context that Ficino would have produced, or would have been invited to produce, a text for Botticelli's *Primavera* which, it is generally agreed, was painted at some date between 1478 and 1482,¹⁵ and probably earlier rather than later in this period.

If Ficino and his new interpretations of Plato and the early Platonists met with any responses in the visual arts, therefore, we should

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 119–26, cat. 14, pl. 54.

¹² M. M. Bullard, 'Marsilio Ficino and the Medici: The Inner Dimensions of Patronage', in *Christianity and the Renaissance*, ed. by T. Verdon and J. Henderson, Syracuse, NY, 1990, pp. 467–92.

¹³ G. B. Picotti, 'Tra il Poeta e il Lauro, I', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 65 (1915), pp. 263–303, at pp. 278–81; I. Maier, *Ange Politien. La formation d'un poète humaniste (1469–1480)*, Geneva, 1966, p. 35.

¹⁴ R. Fubini, 'Ficino e i Medici all'avvento di Lorenzo il Magnifico', *Rinascimento*, 2a ser., 24 (1984), pp. 3–52; Bullard, 'Ficino and the Medici', p. 480.

¹⁵ R. Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 2 vols, London, 1978, I, pp. 72–81 and II, pp. 51–53, cat. B39.

perhaps not search for them in the cultural context of Lorenzo the Magnificent's halcyon years which saw the production of the *Primavera*. To be sure, Lorenzo doubtless encouraged Ficino in his Neoplatonic writings, and doubtless welcomed the completion of Ficino's translation of the complete *Dialogues*, and of his *Theologia Platonica de immortalitate animorum* in 1474. Still in hope of further Medicean patronage, Ficino dedicated his commentary on Plotinus to Lorenzo in 1491. And certainly, one work of art devised for Lorenzo only shortly before his death may well have had more than a small element of Ficinian Neoplatonism woven into its intellectual conception. This is the frieze, probably completed after Lorenzo's death, for the portico of his new villa at Poggio a Caiano.¹⁶ The meaning of this elaborate allegory is still somewhat enigmatic, but it seems probable that, by reference to classical mythology, it links two basic ideas. The first is the Neoplatonic theme of the weary journey of the soul through life towards a final reunion with the Creator; and the second is the Laurentian theme that the passage of Time through the course of the seasons will lead to the restoration of a golden age: 'le temps revient'. Ficinian Neoplatonism is thus blended with poetic interpretations of the passage of Time characteristic of the culture of Lorenzo the Magnificent's circle. Another recent interpretation of the meaning of the frieze revolves around the Myth of Er, and the contrast between Good and Evil as expounded by Plato in Book X of the *Republic*.¹⁷ The central section focuses on the two-headed Janus, the God of the changing year who was celebrated on 1 January, Lorenzo's birthday. Janus stands in front of the door to his temple, from which Mars, God of War, emerges. He looks back towards the origins of Good and Evil at the dawn of civilization, and forward towards the iniquitous effects of Evil in warfare and the beneficent

¹⁶ Recently restored and now displayed within the villa, this frieze and its meaning were discussed by L. Medri, 'La misteriosa genesi del fregio in terracotta inventriata della villa di Poggio a Caiano e l'ipotesi della doppia committenza', in *L'Architettura di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, exhibition catalogue, Spedale degli Innocenti, Florence, 1992, ed. by G. Morolli, C. Acidini Luchinat and L. Marchetti, Florence, 1992, pp. 94-100; see also F. Landi, *Le Temps Revient. Il fregio di Poggio a Caiano*, San Giovanni Valdarno, 1986; C. Acidini Luchinat, 'La Scelta dell'Anima: la vita dell'iniquo e del giusto nel fregio di Poggio a Caiano', *Artista*, 3 (1991), pp. 16-25.

¹⁷ C. Acidini Luchinat, 'In the Sign of Janus', in *Renaissance Florence. The Age of Lorenzo de' Medici, 1449-1492*, exhibition catalogue, Accademia Italiana delle Arti e delle Arti Applicate, London, 1993-94, ed. by C. Acidini Luchinat, London, 1993, pp. 139-41. See also Allen's essay in this volume.

effects of Good as seen in agrarian labours in different seasons. In the final section the charioteer of Evil is halted at the gateway of death by the Goddess of Justice, while the charioteer of Good is welcomed through the gate to rise to immortality (Fig. 4).

This image brings us to a possible resolution of the issue of early Neoplatonism and the visual arts. 'Ficino's own visual sensibility was slight', as Wind tactfully put it;¹⁸ and as suggested before, Ficino's philosophical ideas are not generally susceptible of visual representation because of their abstract character. But this one, the image of a genius of victory driving the chariot of the soul drawn by two horses upwards towards immortality, of which we have several variants in Ficino's writings, works admirably visually. Indeed, it has a direct visual analogue in a classical gem of *Nike riding a biga* (Fig. 5) acquired by Lorenzo the Magnificent from the collection of Pope Paul II in 1471, but certainly known to the Medici before that date.¹⁹ Two adaptations of the image on this cameo, both I believe made in the 1460s, several years before Lorenzo assumed leadership of the Medici family at the death of his father in 1469, may suggest that it is very early on in his association with the Medici that Ficino's influence on the visual arts may best be sought. It was, after all, Lorenzo's grandfather Cosimo 'il Vecchio' de' Medici who initially supported Ficino, the son of his doctor. According to Vespasiano da Bisticci, Cosimo provided Ficino with 'a house in Florence and a farm at Careggi, giving him thus income sufficient to allow him to live . . . and generally to serve his need',²⁰ and Ficino himself referred to Cosimo as a second father to him. It is in this pre-Laurentian context, in the context of the last years of Cosimo's life, that the specifically Ficinian image of the chariot of the soul can first be found transposed into visual form.

In the dedicatory introduction to his translation of Plotinus in 1491, Ficino notes that the lectures given by Gemistos Plethon at the time of the Council of Florence in 1439 suggested to Cosimo the idea of establishing an academy for the promotion of Platonic

¹⁸ Wind, *Pagan Mysteries*, p. 110; he continues '... and his thoughts [on art] are those of a stranger'.

¹⁹ *Il Tesoro di Lorenzo de' Medici: Le gemme*, exhibition catalogue, Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, Florence, 1972, ed. by N. Dacos, A. Giuliani and U. Pannuti, Florence, 1973, pp. 44-45, no. 7.

²⁰ Vespasiano da Bisticci, *The Vespasiano Memoirs. Lives of Illustrious Men of the XVth Century*, tr. by W. G. and E. Waters, London, 1926; repr. New York, 1963, p. 230.

studies.²¹ In 1505, Giovanni Corsi wrote that ‘when Cosimo heard [Plethon] frequently discoursing before the scholars and winning their highest applause and admiration, it is said that he was set ablaze with an extraordinary desire to recall to Italy as soon as possible the philosophy of Plato . . .’.²² However, it is very unlikely that Cosimo himself had good enough Greek to understand Plethon. Moreover, there is no evidence that he took any steps to encourage the study of Plato’s metaphysical writings during the fifteen years between Plethon’s presence at the Council of Florence in 1439 and the Peace of Lodi in 1454.²³

After leaving Constantinople following the sack in 1453, the Aristotelian Johannes Argyropoulus found his way in 1456 to Florence, where he was supported by members of the Medici circle.²⁴ With ‘certain of his scholars’, according to Vespasiano, Argyropoulus would visit Cosimo who ‘questioned him on certain matters: on the immortality of the soul and other questions of theology and philosophy’.²⁵ It is interesting that Vespasiano should have noted in particular Cosimo’s enquiries about the immortality of the soul, for Ficino too discussed this issue in his *Theologia Platonica*:

they call the soul a ‘chariot’ . . . [whose] path is a straight line . . . [T]hey also attribute to this chariot ‘two wings’, the impulse of the intellect towards the truth and of the will towards the good; a charioteer, the intelligence; [and] a head for the charioteer, the divine unity higher than the intelligence . . .²⁶

In his *De voluptate* of 1457, Ficino had in fact already advanced a similar notion:

²¹ A. Chastel, *Marsile Ficin et l'art*, Geneva and Lille, 1954; repr. Geneva 1975 and 1996, p. 8; A. Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence*, Princeton, 1988, pp. 12–13. On Plethon, see C. M. Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon. The Last of the Hellenes*, Oxford, 1986; J. Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Leiden etc., 1990, pp. 197–208.

²² P. O. Kristeller, ‘Per la biografia di Marsilio Ficino’, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, 4 vols, Rome, 1956–96, I, pp. 191–211; the quotation is given on p. 196.

²³ For this reason, Arthur Field’s book focuses ‘on that period when Florentine Neoplatonism first flourished, the decade from the Peace of Lodi (1454) to the death of Cosimo de’ Medici (1464)’, *Origins of the Platonic Academy*, p. 10.

²⁴ For Argyropoulus, see Field, *Origins*, pp. 60–76; for his relations with Cosimo, *ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

²⁵ Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Memoirs*, pp. 229–30.

²⁶ M. J. B. Allen, *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer*, Berkeley etc., 1981, pp. 228–30 (*Theologia Platonica*, XVII.2).

Plato calls wings those [powers] by which the soul flies back to the heights whence it had descended . . . The soul can fly back with two powers, the contemplative and the moral . . . Plato means these two powers to be the soul's wings . . .²⁷

And the same image of the soul's two wings recurs in Ficino's *De divino furore*, addressed to Pellegrino degli Agli in December 1457.²⁸ It was evidently a metaphor with some currency in the Ficino circle during the late 1450s.

As we saw with the Poggio a Caiano frieze, this image is one that has the potential for concrete visual expression. Indeed, it has plausibly been argued that this Neoplatonic idea lies behind the adaptation of the *Nike* cameo in two Florentine works of the 1460s. The later of the two (Fig. 6) is self-evidently funerary and commemorative: a small relief on the plinth of the tomb of the Cardinal of Portugal in S. Miniato al Monte was carved in Antonio Rossellino's workshop between 1461 and 1466.²⁹ Here the cameo was adapted in such a way that the horses are differentiated in character, one pulling confidently upwards and the other downwards. This contrast generated in the process of reinterpretation appears to be a close visual parallel to Ficino's philosophical image. The man who commissioned the tomb was Bishop Alvaro Afonso of Portugal, a learned and important figure in church and Portuguese politics between around 1440 and 1470. No evidence has been found of a direct association in Florence in the early to mid-1460s between either the

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 218–20.

²⁸ Field, *Origins*, pp. 181–82; see also Ficino's *De amore* (1468–69), VII.14, in Allen, *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer*, pp. 220–25, with analysis in Allen's *Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of his 'Phaedrus' Commentary, its Sources and Genesis*, Berkeley etc., 1984, ch. 9.

²⁹ F. Hartt, G. Corti and C. Kennedy, *The Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal, 1434–1459, at San Miniato in Florence*, Philadelphia, 1964, pp. 83–89 and fig. 84; A. Chastel, *Art et humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique: études sur la Renaissance et l'humanisme platonicien*, Paris, 1959, p. 41. Further on the Cardinal of Portugal Chapel, see recently M. Hansmann, 'Die Kapelle des Kardinals von Portugal in S. Miniato al Monte: Ein dynastisches Grabmonument aus der Zeit Piero de' Medici', in *Piero de' Medici 'il Gottoso' (1416–1469): Art in the Service of the Family*, ed. by A. Beyer and B. Boucher, Berlin, 1993, pp. 291–316; L. A. Koch, 'The Early Christian Revival at S. Miniato al Monte: The Cardinal of Portugal Chapel', *Art Bulletin*, 78 (1996), pp. 527–55; and the article by Eric Apfelstadt, 'Bishop and Pawn: New Documents for the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal at S. Miniato al Monte, Florence', in *Cultural Links between Portugal and Italy in the Renaissance*, ed. by K. J. P. Lowe, Oxford, 2000, pp. 183–223. I am grateful to Eric Apfelstadt for his advice on this question.

Cardinal of Portugal or Bishop Afonso and the Medici circle, although it seems likely that a member of the Portuguese royal family who was also a prince of the church would have been welcomed to the Palazzo Medici. But whether or not Bishop Afonso was in touch with Ficino, he was certainly capable of appropriating the 'chariot of the soul' image with full appreciation of its Platonic significance.

A closely similar adaptation of the *Nike* cameo appears on the medallion (Fig. 7) worn around the neck of a *Bust of a Youth* in the Bargello, Florence (Fig. 8).³⁰ Luba Freedman has recently shown that the youth's features correspond exactly in size and position with the canon of proportions later proposed by Ficino, in *De amore*, for composing a human face of perfect beauty.³¹ This canon shows a shift from the proportional system described earlier in the century, which is based on modules and measurements, to one emphasizing congruity and harmony of the features. Very unusually for Florentine portrait sculpture, the bust is in prestigious and expensive bronze, which immediately suggests that it was a Medici commission. Unlike the sharp individualisation typical of marble portrait-busts (a genre then only recently reformulated in Florence), this bust is also highly idealized. In conjunction with the medallion imagery, this indicates that it is a memorial bust, a posthumous image rather than a portrait in the strict sense.

There has been much debate over the authorship, date and purpose of this bust. Given the use of Ficinian proportions, and the Platonic image with its associations both with Ficino's ideas in *De voluptate* and with Cosimo de' Medici's concern with the issue of the immortality of the soul as his own death loomed, it is in my view likely that it was commissioned by Cosimo himself. Freedman suggests that it is an ideal representation of Socrates's young friend

³⁰ For this, see R. Wittkower, 'A Symbol of Platonic Love in a Portrait Bust by Donatello', *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 1 (1937-38), pp. 260-61; A. Chastel, 'Le Jeune Homme au camée platonicien du Bargello', *Proporzioni*, 3 (1950), pp. 73-74; H. W. Janson, *The Sculpture of Donatello*, Princeton, 1957, p. 143; Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences*, p. 189; I. Lavin, 'On the Sources and Meaning of the Renaissance Portrait Bust', *Art Quarterly*, 33 (1970), pp. 207-26; *Omaggio a Donatello*, exhibition catalogue, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, ed. by P. Barocchi, N. Collareta, G. Gaeta Bertelà, G. Gentilini and B. Paolozzi Strozzi, Florence, 1985, pp. 336-42, cat. XVII.

³¹ L. Freedman, 'Donatello's *Bust of a Youth* and the Ficino Canon of Proportions', in *Il ritratto e la memoria. Materiali*, ed. by A. Gentili, 3 vols, Rome, 1989, I, pp. 113-32.

Isocrates as an 'athlete of virtue',³² but a more pragmatic interpretation is that it may have been produced to commemorate Cosimo de' Medici's second son Giovanni, who died in 1463. At that date Donatello was the only bronze sculptor whom Cosimo could and would turn to; and although it has often been doubted, there is, in my view, no difficulty in accepting the attribution to Donatello. It seems entirely characteristic of Donatello's profound sense of decorum that he should work in a style and handling of his bronze which is as different from that of the contemporaneous bronze pulpits in S. Lorenzo as it is appropriate to the function of a commemorative bust.³³

In both this bust and the Cardinal of Portugal tomb relief, Ficino's image of the soul's winged ascent is given visual expression. In an article published in 1979, I proposed a Neoplatonic reading of Donatello's bronze *David* (Fig. 9).³⁴ I interpreted the figure in the light of Plato's *Symposium* and once more of Ficino's *De voluptate*, and suggested that in its sensuous youthfulness the figure might be understood as an image of Platonic Divine Love. Ten years later I returned to the problem, and proposed that the wings on Goliath's helmet may be understood in terms of Ficino's Platonic image of the wings of the ascending soul.³⁵ This interpretation has seemed improbable to some scholars,³⁶ but in the context of relations between Cosimo de' Medici and Marsilio Ficino in the later 1450s it may not be entirely implausible. There is a growing tendency in Medici patronage studies to associate the casting of the bronze *David*, its erection in the Palazzo Medici courtyard, and the text attached to its high plinth, with the crisis that developed in Florentine politics, and within the Medici party, in summer 1458, which led to Cosimo's audacious

³² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

³³ On Donatello's sensitivity in ensuring that the style in which he worked was appropriate to the function and/or location of each sculptural project, see F. Ames-Lewis, 'Art History or *Stilkritik*? Donatello's Bronze *David* Reconsidered', *Art History*, 2 (1979), pp. 139-55, and *idem*, 'Donatello and the Decorum of Place', in *Decorum in Renaissance Narrative Art*, ed. by F. Ames-Lewis, London, 1992, pp. 52-60.

³⁴ Ames-Lewis, 'Art History or *Stilkritik*?'.

³⁵ F. Ames-Lewis, 'Donatello's Bronze *David* and the Palazzo Medici Courtyard', *Renaissance Studies*, 3 (1989), pp. 235-51.

³⁶ The earlier dates of 1440-41 and 1428-30, recently proposed respectively by J. Pope-Hennessy, *Donatello Sculptor*, New York, 1993, p. 155 and by C. M. Sperling, 'Donatello's Bronze "David" and the Demands of Medici Politics', *Burlington Magazine*, 134 (1992), pp. 218-24, for example, would rule out any Ficinian imagery in the bronze *David*.

coup d'état in August that year.³⁷ This dating is, in my view, the one that is most probably correct; and if it is, it means of course that the *David* was devised at much the time that the young Ficino first came to the notice of Cosimo 'il Vecchio', just as Cosimo began more seriously to prepare for his own death.

Perhaps then the wings on Goliath's helmet, and the relief with its chariot ridden by winged genii can, after all, like the medallion on the bronze bust, be explained in terms of Ficino's image of the soul's ascent? Certainly, reading the figure within this intellectual context helps to explain the abstracted, contemplative expression on David's face, which seems such an unexpected response to his very recent triumph over the Philistine giant. Given these possibilities, and the artistic responses in the early to mid-1460s to the Ficinian image of the Phaedran charioteer, it may appear that we can best seek for visual reflections of Ficino's Neoplatonism not within the Laurentian cultural context that stimulated the poetic imagery of Botticelli's *Primavera*, but rather in works produced at around the time of the last years of Cosimo de' Medici's life and of his death in 1464.

³⁷ See, for example, R. Crum, 'Donatello's Bronze *David* and the Question of Foreign Versus Domestic Tyranny', *Renaissance Studies*, 10 (1996), pp. 440-50.

FICINO'S ADVICE TO PRINCES

Valery Rees

Ficino is not commonly regarded as a political philosopher, yet woven into his copious correspondence and philosophical works are many recurrent strands of political counsel. This paper examines a number of works which touch on political issues in order to establish some of the basic tenets of Ficino's political philosophy, and to consider what made him think his advice might be heeded. The works include pieces that Ficino dedicated to the Medici, his correspondence with King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, his offerings to Federico da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, and a few other letters to the king of Naples, the pope, and the young prince of the church, Cardinal Raffaele Riario. Individuals close to princes, such as Francesco Berlinghieri, Bernardo Bembo, Filippo Valori and Piero Soderini, will also be mentioned.

Some letters to princes mentioned in Ficino's letters are irrelevant to our theme: Ficino's oration of 1494 to the king of France, Charles VIII, can be seen as a lavish rhetorical plea for the liberty of the city of Florence in the face of invasion.¹ Three letters to the German Prince, Eberhard of Württemberg appear at first sight more germane.² The first contains an idealized sketch of princely qualities according to Platonic tradition—the ideal prince would, like Pallas,

¹ Marsilio Ficino, *Epistolae*, XII.37, in *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basel, 1576; repr. Turin, 1959 etc., pp. 960–61. This is described as an *oratio* rather than a letter and may have been spoken to the king in person. During 1494 there were skirmishes between French and Florentine troops. By the end of the year Piero de' Medici was unable to retain power in Florence, and many Florentines supported an accommodation with Charles VIII. See David Abulafia, *The French Descent into Renaissance Italy*, Aldershot, 1995, esp. pp. 20–21. This oration is an extreme example of what I shall refer to later in another context, Ficino's tendency to lavish praise on the princely office while reminding the prince of his proper business, in this case, waging war on the infidel rather than exploiting his allies.

² Ficino, *Ep.*, XI.23 and 32, and XII.2, *Opera omnia*, pp. 932–33, 944 and 946–47. Eberhard VI (1445–96) was Count of Württemberg from 1459. He introduced extensive administrative and ecclesiastical reforms and founded the university of Tübingen in 1477. In 1495 his state was elevated to a Duchy and he became its first Duke.

wield power in equal measure with wisdom; like Caesar, display magnanimity with clemency; like Scipio, seriousness with affability; he would rule with the justice of Minos, establish religion like Numa, and spread peace like Augustus. Eberhard, preferring peace to war, and founding churches and schools, clearly stands as a willing follower of this Platonic ideal. In the other two letters, Ficino compares Eberhard to the sun in the sky, sending him his *Comparison of the Sun to God*,³ and reminding him that the sun we see is only a shadow of the true light. This may contain a veiled message about not over-reaching himself, but Ficino is encouraging Eberhard's philosophical interests rather than giving him practical political advice. Indeed, to Piero Soderini as a young man embarking on his political career, he specifically warned that 'the exaltation of the Sun is most distant from Libra, the exaltation of Saturn'.⁴ In other words, rulership and philosophy pull in opposite directions.⁵

In six letters to a prince of the church, Cardinal Marco Barbo, we see Ficino seeking to establish common ground, invoking the good offices of his friend Antonio Calderini and of the god Mercury (or intelligence) to bring this about. But these letters belong to the

³ In 1479 Ficino wrote a letter entitled *Orphica comparatio solis ad Deum atque declaratio idearum*. It was sent jointly by him and Giovanni Cavalcanti to Lotterio Neroni, *Opera omnia*, pp. 825–26, and *Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, translated by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, 6 vols to date, London, 1975–, V, pp. 44–47. By 1492, the date of the three letters to Eberhard, Ficino had expanded his thoughts on the sun, which find full expression in the short book *De sole* published the following year (*Opera omnia*, pp. 965–75). The third letter to Count Eberhard is identical with the thirteenth and last chapter of *De sole* (*Opera omnia*, pp. 974–75); see P. O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2 vols, Florence, 1937, I, pp. cxi–cxiv. The essence of the message to Eberhard seems to be not to mistake the mirror (the sun in the sky) or the mirror of the mirror (the splendour of kingship) for the supercelestial sun from which all light and power derive. For further reflections on mirrors, see Sergius Kodera's paper in this volume. I am indebted to Mrs Maria Zammit of Malta for allowing me to read her hitherto unpublished translation of *De sole*. Another translation of this work by G. Cornelius, D. Costello, G. Tobbyn, A. Voss and V. Wells appeared in *Sphinx*, 6 (1994), pp. 123–48.

⁴ See the forthcoming *Letters*, VII.45 (*Opera omnia*, pp. 884–85), probably written in 1487. For Soderini's subsequent career, see Rosalyn P. Cooper, 'Piero Soderini, Aspiring Prince or Civic Leader?', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, n.s., I (1978), pp. 69–126. The exaltation of a planet is the place in the zodiac in which it was considered to exert its greatest influence.

⁵ 'Now the Sun signifies rulers, but Saturn signifies philosophers and contemplatives. Could anyone who understands these things ever hope that philosophers will become kings, or kings philosophers? This can certainly be brought about only by divine influence, and our Plato earnestly desired this as a divine gift.' *Letters*, VII.45 (*Opera omnia*, pp. 884–85).

period of Ficino's concern to find in Rome good friends and backers to support the publication of his work on Plotinus and to defend it from potential attack, and they reflect these concerns rather than any political thinking.⁶

There are also many letters throughout the twelve books written to individuals involved in public life to whom Ficino offers general or particular comments on the conduct of public affairs. Leading citizens and statesmen were among his closest friends, including ambassadors of and to Florence.⁷ A full investigation of Ficino's relations with princes would have to cover these sources in detail, as well as the delicacy of his relations with Rome,⁸ his relationship with four generations of the Medici family, and his letters from the mid-1490s to members of the French royal court.⁹

But let us turn to that handful of princes and ambassadors named earlier. In addition to the letters Ficino wrote to individuals there is a substantial body of writings he presented for their consideration. In the case of the Medici and King Matthias, this includes his translations of and commentaries on the whole of Plato, of Plotinus and other writers in the Platonic tradition,¹⁰ his own *Theologia Platonica*,

⁶ *Ep.* VIII.24, 26, 39, 42, 66, and X.21 (*Opera omnia*, pp. 874, 875, 883, 884, 892 and 911). In 1467 Marco Barbo was described by the Ferrarese ambassador in Rome as 'the right eye' of his uncle Pope Paul II. He continued to enjoy universal respect as a man of integrity in an otherwise corrupt papal court. His irenic character seems quite close to that of Ficino. See M. M. Bullard, 'Renaissance Spirituality and the Ethical Dimension of Church Reform in the Age of Savonarola: The Dilemma of Cardinal Marco Barbo', in *The World of Savonarola. Italian Elites and Perceptions of Crisis*, ed. by S. Fletcher and C. Shaw, Aldershot, 2000, pp. 64–89.

⁷ Ficino lists his friends in a letter to Martin Prenninger, *Ep.* XI.27 (*Opera omnia*, p. 936). Among his immediate circle were several influential statesmen and diplomats including Francesco Berlinghieri (1440–1500), Bernardo Bembo of Venice (1433–1519), Filippo Valori (1456–94) and Piero Soderini (1452–1522). For further details of these men, see note 15 below.

⁸ The papacy must be regarded as a political entity as well as arbiter of the orthodoxy or otherwise of Ficino's writings. Letters to the pope or any papal official may therefore have some political aspects. But the most obviously political of Ficino's letters to Rome are the three letters to Pope Sixtus IV discussed below. See also P. O. Kristeller, 'Marsilio Ficino and the Roman Curia', in his *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, 4 vols, Rome, 1956–96, IV, pp. 265–80.

⁹ For Ficino's relations with Cosimo and Lorenzo, see especially R. Fubini, 'Ficino e i Medici all'avvento di Lorenzo il Magnifico', *Rinascimento*, 2a ser., 24 (1984), pp. 3–52, idem, 'Ancora su Ficino e i Medici', *Rinascimento*, 2a ser., 27 (1987), pp. 275–91, and M. M. Bullard, 'Marsilio Ficino and the Medici: The Inner Dimensions of Patronage', in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, ed. by T. Verdon and J. Henderson, Syracuse, NY, 1990, pp. 467–92.

¹⁰ Including Iamblichus, Proclus, Synesius and Dionysius. A list of editions of

De Christiana religione and *De vita* and his collected *Letters*.¹¹ To the Duke of Urbino he made a special gift of three works: an epitome of Plato's *Statesman*, a remarkable *Geography* produced by Berlinghieri (which is virtually an atlas, a work of immediate practical value to a prince), and an important letter on the limitations of astrology.¹² But we also know that his complete Plato translation was being copied for Federico because it became the subject of much irritation when the originals disappeared in the financial confusion that followed the Duke's death.¹³ It is also significant that he chose to dedicate the second book of his letters to Federico, a book markedly different from the rest, for, as he says, 'I decided to separate all those letters that dealt especially with Platonic theology . . . and collect them into one book' on the grounds that their subject matter is not human but divine. Federico's 'divine virtue' makes him specially suitable for the dedication, because in Platonic terms it is what has brought to fulfilment in him the *idea* of human potential (*absoluti viri*) as well as perfect leadership (*consummati principis*). With

Ficino's works is to be found in Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, pp. lvii–lxxxv, updated in *Marsilio Ficino and his Work after Five Hundred Years*, Florence, 1987, pp. 112–44.

¹¹ *De Christiana religione* and *Theologia Platonica* were dedicated to Lorenzo, appearing in print in 1476 and 1482 respectively, but copies of them were also sent to Matthias Corvinus. The *De vita* in its entirety, published in 1489, was dedicated to Lorenzo, but the second book is dedicated jointly to Filippo Valori and Lorenzo, and the third book, the most controversial, bears a separate dedication to King Matthias. *De Christiana religione* lacks a modern critical edition and translation. For *Theologia Platonica*, see the new edition by Allen and Hankins, of which the first volume has appeared (*Platonic Theology, Volume I, Books I–IV*, English translation by M. J. B. Allen with J. Warden, Latin text edited by J. Hankins with W. Bowen, Cambridge, Mass., 2001). For *De vita* see *Marsilio Ficino: Three Books on Life*, ed. and tr. by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark, Binghamton, NY, 1989. The individual books of the *Letters* bear various dedications, III and IV being dedicated to Matthias. Illuminated manuscript copies of books III and IV and later a copy of books I–VIII were made for the king, at Valori's expense.

¹² See *Letters*, VI.22, 23 and 17. The *Statesman* epitome is printed in *Opera omnia*, pp. 1294–96. The atlas was the *Cosmographia* or *Geographia* of Francesco Berlinghieri. This work is an elaborate description of the world in *terza rima* based on classical and contemporary sources and accompanied by a set of maps. Federico da Montefeltro's illuminated manuscript copy is in the Vatican library (MS Urb. Lat. 273); the book was printed with engraved maps at Florence in 1482 (*Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*, 3870; facsimile, ed. by R. A. Skelton, Amsterdam, 1966). Letter 17 on astrology is entitled *Divine law cannot be made by the heavens, but may perhaps be indicated by them*. All three items may be dated to early 1482, the year of the duke's appointment as commander-in-chief of the league comprising Florence, Naples and Ferrara against the Pope and Venice (although he had earlier led the papal armies).

¹³ See Ficino *Letters*, VI.24, 33 and 43.

typical hyperbole he adds, 'If Diogenes himself, who denied the possibility of thinking about the Platonic *ideas*, set eyes on Federico he would be obliged to admit that the *ideas* can not only be understood in the mind but even seen with the eyes.'¹⁴

To Riario he wrote eleven letters over a fourteen-year period, to the king of Naples one major communication, to Pope Sixtus IV three letters which, if not sent, were nonetheless soon published. Letters to Berlinghieri, Bembo, Valori and Soderini were only part of a close personal relationship.¹⁵ From these letters and works two main themes emerge: first, a vision of society, and second, the ethical implications for action that it entails for rulers.

At the opening of the seventh book of his letters, in the dedicatory preface to Berlinghieri, written while Florence was at war, Ficino quotes the psalmist, 'Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!'¹⁶ This is surely not just a

¹⁴ Preface to Book II of the Letters, *Opera omnia*, p. 674.

¹⁵ Francesco Berlinghieri was a Florentine patrician, poet and geographer, within the inner circles of the city's government. He was a close friend of Lorenzo de' Medici as well as of Ficino. Bernardo Bembo, father of Pietro Bembo, travelled on many significant embassies for Venice, initially to Castile, Burgundy and Austria in the years 1469 to 1474. His first embassy to Florence began in January 1475. The second covered the period when Venice and Florence were at war, following the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478. From 1481 to 1483 Bembo was Captain of the Venetian port of Ravenna, and in 1486 and 1487-88 ambassador to Pope Innocent VIII. He later held governorships in the Venetian territories and represented his state in Rome with two missions in 1503 and 1505. While in Florence, Bembo became a close friend of Ficino and was the dedicatee of Book V of the *Letters* as well the *Oration in Praise of Philosophy* (*Letters*, I, p. 186), and a letter on the *Convivium* (*Letters*, II, p. 51). There are 30 letters to Bembo in all, making him Ficino's third most frequent addressee after Cavalcanti and Lorenzo de' Medici. Filippo Valori was a wealthy patrician merchant and ambassador. He gave Ficino valuable support for his publications, especially during the period 1483-92, funding the publication of his Plato translations in 1484. While Valori was ambassador to Rome in 1492, he defended Ficino's *De sole*. There are fourteen letters addressed to Filippo Valori. Piero Soderini's family also had high political ambitions. Piero himself was a close companion of Ficino in the 1470s before embarking on his diplomatic career. After Ficino's death, he was given power as *Gonfaloniere* (1502-20), chosen for his ability to reunite the factions of Florence. During the time he held that post, he reduced corruption in government in Florence; however, his adherence to Ficinian philosophical principles did not result in political strength. Machiavelli's frustration at serving under him may have influenced *The Prince*. Only two letters are extant to Soderini (one is repeated at the end of Book I and in Book III, the second is quoted here: see note 4 above), but he is mentioned in the letter to Prenninger, and was undoubtedly much influenced by Ficino.

¹⁶ Psalm 133:1. These are also the closing words of the first book of Dante's *Monarchia*, with which Ficino was familiar (having produced a vernacular translation in 1468; see below), so their political connotations were well established.

personal message, nor can it be taken as a simplistic appeal for a millenarian brotherhood of equals, for Ficino was fully aware of differentiations of rank and office, and careful to observe the proper forms of address, of respect and even reverence where due.¹⁷ Written to a member of his own circle, it is also unlikely to be an appeal for harmony between the warring states. Rather it is an appeal to the very foundation of order, the same unity that lies at the root of all his thinking,

for we all are one in Him who alone in truth is one. We all stand fast in Him who alone through His own strength abides. We all love one another in Him who alone is worthy of love for His own sake; through Him alone each one is lovable; for His sake only each is worthy of love.¹⁸

It is that love that holds the entire world in continued existence, and which draws the soul of man to recognize and reunite with its source. In a letter towards the end of the seventh book, to Matteo of Forlì, written around 1483, Ficino gives four reasons why the power of love transforms man into God. The fourth and strongest reason rests upon the view that created things are shadows of causes in the divine mind: 'Nothing reminds us of the beauty of the Creator Himself more quickly than the beauty of created things.' From perception of beauty arises a yearning for that beauty, and it is through this rather than the pursuit of knowledge or any other power that 'the mind, regaining its wings, flies back to its true home'.¹⁹ To Filippo Carducci, another Florentine noble and office-holder, he writes in even stronger terms that love rather than knowledge transforms us into God:

If God were to make all things purely by naked intelligence, perhaps everything would understand and not stray at all from that right understanding. . . . But not all created things have knowledge and those that do often go astray in the act of knowing. It therefore follows that all things have been created by the Creator not so much through intel-

¹⁷ His extravagant address to Charles VIII is mentioned in n. 1 above. His style to Barbo is formal and correct, beginning invariably with 'Marsilio Ficino humbly commends himself to his Reverend Father in Christ, his lord Marco of Venice, Cardinal of San Marco.' Bembo, his close friend, 'charissime', 'dulcissime', is also graced with his full title 'Bernardo Bembo iuris consulto equiti, doctrina et autoritate praeclaro Venetorum oratori' or like variants. In the body of each letter, Ficino also takes care to use a style of writing appropriate to the recipient.

¹⁸ Preface of *Epistolae* VII, to Francesco Berlinghieri (*Letters*, VI, p. 3).

¹⁹ *Letters*, VI, pp. 54-56.

ligence as through will . . . And just as they have come forth through the desire of the good, so wherever they may be, they return through that same desire.

After a stirring peroration, the letter concludes in the voice of the Almighty:

Acknowledge, therefore, how great love is: I have created you through my love; you also, through your love, through love of me, will create yourselves anew in me. Minds, I have made you through love, but through love of God you will one day recreate yourselves as gods. Then shall I say, 'Ye also are gods, and all of you are children of the most High.'²⁰

Love and unity are thus intimately related.

Ficino had found corroborative expression of how the entire cosmos is interrelated, or rather unified, in *Hermes Trismegistus*: God's relationship to his creation is mapped out in Book XI of the *Pimander*, which Ficino translated for Cosimo de' Medici in 1463.²¹ Hermes

²⁰ God is here called 'the true Phoebus' (compare the references to the sun quoted above and notes 3 and 5). Psalms 8, 24 and 82 provide material for this letter, concluding with the quotation of Psalm 82:6. This letter itself concludes the seventh book, which began, as we saw, with Psalm 133 (note 16 above), *Letters*, VI, pp. 57–59. By the 1480s, Ficino was increasingly drawing on biblical sources as well as Platonic in his letters. He further developed the theme of this letter in his address to the chapter of the cathedral and the people of Florence on being appointed canon of the cathedral in 1487:

The whole creation has been brought into being and is sustained because God Himself, the Creator, willed this from the beginning and wills it now. There is no doubt, moreover, that in God will is the same as love and the same as God. With God, I say, will is undoubtedly not any kind of desire, but joy, joy constantly rejoicing in its own goodness. . . . Because God Himself is love and also because the soul, set on fire with the flames of love, loves the most high God within herself, and indeed loves men in God, the soul is wondrously moved by God Himself, who is love, and the soul becomes God. Certainly, just as any kind of timber usually catches fire, not because it receives light from fire but because it receives heat, so the soul, too, at last becomes divine, not because God shines a glimmer of His light upon our understanding but because our will blazes with the flames of divine love. (*Opera omnia*, pp. 881–82, translated in the forthcoming volume VII of the *Letters*.)

²¹ Better known now as the *Corpus Hermeticum*; *Pimander* was the title of the first book which Ficino applied to the whole. In Greek (*Poimandres*) it ostensibly means Shepherd of Men. Its original Egyptian title *p-eime nte-rē* has been convincingly presented as meaning 'the Intelligence of Ra': Peter Kingsley, 'Poimandres: The Etymology of the Name and the Origins of the Hermetica', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 56 (1993), pp. 1–24, at pp. 7 and 11. See also Clement Salaman's contribution to this volume. For translations of the work, see Brian Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, Cambridge, 1992 and Clement Salaman, Dorine Van Oyen and William Wharton, *The Way of Hermes*, London, 1999.

states that the essence of the divine is beauty, supreme good, wisdom and bliss; the active power of the divine is mind and soul. These give rise to an unchanging identity, or eternity, that in turn creates the cosmos with its everlasting revolution of stars and planets; growth and diminution are not eternal but governed by time; life and death and generation are the world in which qualities take form and shape, as reflections of the quality, or essence, of the divine.²²

How does this bear on political philosophy? For Ficino, there is no fundamental separation between cosmology and politics, philosophy and religion, or religion and daily life. This is not to say the church should rule the state or the state the church, but Ficino operates from a conviction that all the activities of man are somehow part of one picture, and are governed by principles that are valid wherever they are applied.

What can we say of the principle of unity in strictly political terms? Can we read into it practical guidelines for the constitution of a state? The obvious reflection of this unity in political terms would be the image of a single head ruling over a body politic, a monarchy. Ficino follows both Plato and Aristotle in regarding monarchy as a suitable form of government for mankind,²³ provided that the king is also devoted to higher aims. In Socrates's famous words:

Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either

²² 'The Supreme good, beauty, bliss and wisdom are, as it were, the essence of God. The essence of eternity is unchanging identity; of the cosmos, order; of time, change; of generation, life and death. But the active power of God is mind and soul; that of eternity, duration and immortality; of the cosmos, the everlasting revolution of stars and planets; of time, growth and diminution; of generation, the creation of qualities. Therefore eternity is in God, the cosmos in eternity, time in the cosmos, generation in time. Eternity stands still before God, the cosmos is moved in eternity, time passes through the cosmos and generation takes place in time.

The source of all is God, the essence of all is eternity, the substance of all is the cosmos; the potentiality of God is eternity, the work of eternity is the cosmos, which is never born, but is always coming into existence through eternity.' *Corpus Hermeticum*, XI.2-3, in the translation of *The Way of Hermes*.

²³ E.g. Plato, *Republic*, IV, 445 (cf. IX, 576); Aristotle, *Politics*, III, 1285b. The arguments for monarchy are also very fully developed in Dante's *Monarchia*, Book I. Dante's close dependence on Aristotelian sources (the *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *Ethics* and *De caelo* as well as *Politics*) as also on Aquinas and the Bible, is well documented in the appendix to Richard Kay's edition (*Dante's 'Monarchia'*, translated with a commentary by R. Kay, Toronto, 1998), esp. pp. 332-40.

to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils—no, nor the human race, as I believe.²⁴

Even to Socrates this claim seemed somewhat extravagant and he added the remark, 'to be convinced that in no other state can there be happiness private or public is indeed a hard thing'.²⁵

When writing to Hungary or Naples or France, Ficino had plenty of scope to express his support for kingship as an institution. Yet he seems to have felt no inconsistency in supporting the very different regime of the Florentine oligarchy under which he lived. While some contemporary critics felt the Medici family were high-handed enough to be considered as kings, Ficino's correspondence with men in a wide range of situations suggests that he felt existing authority deserved support, whether or not it nominally reflected that unity, the form of government being less significant than the direction and goal.²⁶ As someone for whom the care of souls was paramount, the fundamental aim was not just a harmony of parts within the whole, an aim that might have satisfied Aristotle.²⁷ Rather he has in mind specific Platonic antecedents that involve the ruler leading society towards the tranquillity that comes from drawing closer to the common source.²⁸ In his summary of Plato's *Philosopher*, Ficino speaks of the need 'to know the divine and govern the human'.²⁹ The philosopher or ruler

first contemplates, through wisdom, the divine or absolute nature of the Good. Then he governs human affairs by directing men's activities towards their end in this Good. But there are two prerequisites for this. The first is a recognition of what human nature is and of

²⁴ Plato, *Republic*, V, 473D.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 473E.

²⁶ In this Ficino followed both Plato and Aristotle. See Aristotle, *Politics*, III.18 (1288a35); Plato's discussions of forms of government are in the *Republic*, *Statesman* and *Laws*. See esp. *Statesman*, 297–303.

²⁷ *Politics*, II, 1. This distinction between harmonious composition and right direction finds a parallel in Ficino's definition of beauty as being not just a harmonious arrangement of parts within a complex whole, but a simple entity with dynamic power: *De amore*, V.3 (tr. in Sears Jayne, *Marsilio Ficino: Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, 2nd edn, Dallas, Tex., 1985; repr. Woodstock, Vt., 1999, p. 88).

²⁸ Plato, *Laws*, IV, 714A: 'as far as the principle of immortality dwells in us, to that we must hearken, both in private and public life and regulate our cities and houses according to law, meaning by the very term law the distribution of mind' (Greek 'τοῦ νοῦ διανομή'), tr. by B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, 2 vols, London, 1892, II, p. 495.

²⁹ Summary of *The Philosopher* or *Lover*, in *Opera omnia*, p. 1131. I am grateful to my colleague Arthur Farndell, whose work first drew this summary to my attention.

how it is delivered from evil and led to the Good: this condition the Philosopher meets through insight. The second is putting in order people's attitudes and actions, moderating and restraining them in such a way that they easily incline towards the Good.

This Good is the unity of which Ficino speaks. This, ultimately, is the same unity of which Dante speaks in his *Monarchia*. Dante used it to justify the rule of a single temporal authority, the Emperor, alongside a single spiritual authority, the Pope. Dante had set out to prove that the emperor, or world ruler, is directly dependent on the prince of the universe, who is God,³⁰ and he used in support of his proof a traditional figure that was to become one of Ficino's favourites, of man occupying a position midway between the world of corruptible things and the divine.³¹

Although Dante's *Monarchia* was rebutted and ritually burned in 1329, it did not altogether disappear and Ficino appears to have been much impressed with it. In 1468 he produced his translation in Italian for Bernardo del Nero and Antonio Manetti, both active participants in Florentine political life, following an earlier less successful attempt at translation by del Nero in 1456.³² In 1481, Florence celebrated a revival of Dante with the republication of the *Divine Comedy*, and Landino's learned and penetrating commentary on it.³³ But as soon as there was an index of prohibited books, *Monarchia* was placed on it,³⁴ its political views too extreme for a post-reformation papacy.³⁵ Nevertheless Ficino seems to have shared Dante's idea of the necessity of a single strong ruler to galvanize European resistance to external threats.

³⁰ Dante, *Monarchy*, III.16.2, ed. and tr. by Prue Shaw, Cambridge, 1995. In the final chapter, Dante extends this point to mean that the emperor is not dependent on the Pope, though he should align himself with him; nor, more especially, is he dependent on the Electors.

³¹ *Ibid.*, III.16.4. This is referred in Shaw's edition to the Aristotelian *Liber de causis*, but it is also a Platonic and Neoplatonic image. Ficino uses the image repeatedly e.g. in *Platonic Theology*, III.2, where the soul is described as 'the bond and knot of the world' ('nodus . . . et copula mundi') and *De amore*, IV.3-4. Cf. Hermes Trismegistus, *Asclepius*, I.10.

³² Kay, *Dante's 'Monarchia'*, p. xxxii. Kay assigns Ficino's version to 1457. Kristeller had dated it to 1468: *Supplementum Ficinianum*, I, p. clxi. It was never published.

³³ See *Letters*, V, p. 79 for Ficino's paean to Dante.

³⁴ In 1554: Dante, *Monarchy*, ed. Shaw, p. xxxiii.

³⁵ This did not stop it from being printed in Protestant Basel in 1559: Dante, *Monarchy*, ed. Shaw, p. xlii.

Throughout Ficino's lifetime, the Turkish threat was taken seriously. Ancient fears and memories dating back to the crusades were constantly reinforced by contact with the Ottoman empire, then in a phase of active expansion. Turkish ways were seen as unpredictable, irrational and brutal. Though their government of conquered territories could in fact at times be quite lenient, their ways were not generally understood, and their values were seen as alien. As in all such situations, cultural difference gave rise to suspicion.

Who could unite the Christian countries against this coming invader? The King of Hungary had already won notable success, and had the potential to fulfil the role of leader of an alliance of European states.³⁶ In October 1480, while the Turks were still in occupation of the southern Italian city of Otranto, Ficino wrote Matthias an 'Exhortation to war'. Thinking of the collapse of Byzantium, he spoke of how the glories of an ancient tradition of learning and teaching had 'fallen down into darkness under the ferocious Turks. Alas, what pain! Stars, I say, have fallen into darkness under savage beasts.'³⁷ He calls Matthias a second Moses,³⁸ leading men of learning out of bondage into freedom: 'For him, God will divide the Red Sea, and will miraculously throw open impenetrable ways in all places. He will straightway liberate God's chosen sons from extreme slavery and affliction.'³⁹ If Matthias could rise to the call of such leadership, Ficino feels the whole earth would give support. Quoting Virgil's famous lines to Augustus, he ends,

On you alone almighty God will confer command without limit. That supreme God who has appointed the Sun in the heavens as King of

³⁶ After Hungary's initial defeat in Kosovo (1448), Matthias's father, János Hunyadi, had won an astonishing victory over the Ottoman forces at Belgrade in 1456. Matthias regained Jajce in Bosnia in 1464 and made a temporary truce. In 1476 he won back Szabács on the lower Danube. A major attack was then made by the Turks in Transylvania in 1479, but Matthias's forces under Pál Kinizsi inflicted a crushing defeat at the Battle of Kenyérmező that kept the Turks away from his Eastern border for a decade. Matthias then sent troops to Italy to the relief of Otranto when it was captured by the Turks. His troops arrived in the early spring of 1481. Ficino's *Exhortation* to Matthias is dated 1 October 1480. Matthias's correspondence relating to this episode is published in V. Fraknoi, *Mátyás Király levelei*, 2 vols, Budapest, 1875, II, pp. 97-111; see the letters dated late 1480 and March 1481.

³⁷ *Letters*, II, p. 4.

³⁸ It is more often Plato who is referred to as a second Moses, or as Moses speaking in the Attic tongue, e.g. *Letters*, VI, p. 35 and in the forthcoming VII, letter 7 (*Opera omnia*, pp. 855 and 866).

³⁹ *Letters*, II, p. 4.

sky and stars, also appointed under the Sun Matthias alone, who should set Ocean as the shores of his sway and the stars as the limits of his glory.⁴⁰

Is this an intimation of *le roi soleil*, or simply an echo of Dante's Emperor?⁴¹ Evidence suggests that Matthias had set his sights on election as Emperor.⁴² However Ficino's comments are perhaps best understood as a call for full power to be vested in a supreme military commander in times of war. For in 1482 he is seen writing in similar terms to Federico, Duke of Montefeltro, who had just been appointed commander-in-chief of the forces of the alliance of Florence, Naples and Ferrara in the war against Venice and the Pope. In the letter of dedication accompanying Berlinghieri's *Geography* early in 1482, Ficino refers to the Duke as 'created . . . to rule the earth' and places 'the whole globe at his feet, in peace as well as in war'.⁴³ Ficino also dedicated to the Duke at about the same time his short summary of Plato's *Statesman*,⁴⁴ which spells out more clearly what world-rule would imply. The letter of dedication for the *Statesman* epitome takes the form of a fable:⁴⁵

Most mighty Jupiter, the supreme, wished to see a kingdom on earth one day, just like the one he always beholds about him in heaven. So by means of the eternal, original and unchanging form of divine kingship he sent down to earth long ago a certain royal and divine soul; he called the heavenly beings together and ordered them all to support this future king. The gods had styled him *Fideregum* because of his kingly faith, and Duke *Orbinatem* because of his authority over the world; but men, changing the letters, were to call him Federico, Duke of Urbino.

He speaks of the support of the other gods, naming wisdom (Pallas Athene) and intelligence (Mercury), and he says,

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5, quoting Virgil, *Aeneid*, I.287; cf. VI.795-97 and 851-53.

⁴¹ It is perhaps just as dangerous to equate medieval and Renaissance concepts of supreme rule as to look for the beginnings of seventeenth-century absolute monarchy in the fifteenth century. But the question is intended to highlight the existence of continuities amid rapid and extensive change.

⁴² For discussion of this, see V. Fraknoi, *Mátyás törekvései a császári trónra*, Budapest, 1914.

⁴³ *Letters*, VI, pp. 37-38.

⁴⁴ *Opera omnia*, pp. 1294-96.

⁴⁵ *Letters*, VI, pp. 36-7. It is one of several fables in this book of *Letters*. Plato's *Statesman*, 269 ff. also contains an important fable about the reversal of everything in life as we know it, during the age of Cronos. See Allen's paper in this volume.

the Academy . . . also rejoices to confer the kingdom on Federico, Duke of Urbino, and the sovereignty of the whole world, such as the divine Plato describes. This is the will of Jupiter, this is the testimony of truth, and these are his just deserts.⁴⁶

The accompanying epitome of Plato's *Statesman* speaks of the king as the one ruler, shepherd and guardian of mankind, and sees the whole human race as one flock over which one shepherd has been appointed. In the Golden Age (the age of Cronos), God is the shepherd. For rule on earth to be like the divine, governorship of the entire world should be entrusted to one man. He 'will prize peace above all and work for the good of all nations'.⁴⁷

It is interesting and significant that Ficino's *Statesman* epitome takes up where Dante left off. Just before the close of the final chapter of *Monarchia*, Dante says,

Ineffable providence has set before us two goals to aim at: happiness in this life, which consists in the exercise of our own powers, and is figured in the earthly paradise; and happiness in the eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of the vision of God, to which our own powers cannot raise us except with the help of God's light, and which is signified by the heavenly paradise . . . We attain the first through the teachings of philosophy, provided that we follow them by putting into practice the moral and intellectual virtues; whereas we attain the second through spiritual teachings which transcend human reason, . . . putting into practice the theological virtues, faith, hope and charity.⁴⁸

Ficino takes up exactly the same point, speaking of the twofold goal and man's twofold duty: to imitate the powers above, and to rule diligently over the forms beneath.⁴⁹ Clearly he is speaking of man's

⁴⁶ *Letters*, VI, p. 37 (*Opera omnia*, p. 855, also found with the epitome itself on p. 1294).

⁴⁷ *Opera omnia*, pp. 1294–96; see also Plato, *Laws*, III, 693; IV, 712–13, and *Statesman*, 271E–272B, 275B–C.

⁴⁸ Dante, *Monarchy*, ed. Shaw, III.16.7–8 (p. 92). In Kay's edition this is III.15.7–8 (pp. 310–15). Kay notes here Dante's debt to Aquinas and to James of Viterbo, but points out that Dante diverges from James of Viterbo by advocating separation of spiritual and temporal powers.

⁴⁹ 'Quamobrem necesse est, certum esse humani generis finem, eumque in actione quadam circa perfectiora consistere, per quam et superiora pro viribus imitetur, et diligenter inferiora gubernet, scientia quidem naturalia perscrutetur, prudentia vero disponat humana, pietate autem divina colat atque veneretur.' *Opera omnia*, p. 1294. The terms *superiora* and *inferiora* are conveniently ambiguous, to avoid getting embroiled in disputes about 'the gods' or 'lower beings'. Cf. the *Philosopher or Lover*, cited at note 29 above.

place on the horizon, connecting the physical with the divine and he goes on to stress the priestly aspects of kingship, the need to unite the contemplative and the active life.⁵⁰

A prince's position in society is beautifully evoked in the description of the garden of philosophy⁵¹ in the dedicatory proem to Lorenzo of his great Plato translation of 1484:

[Philosophy] delights in encouraging all who wish to learn and to live a good life to enter the Platonic Academy . . . In the gardens of the Academy, poets will hear Apollo singing beneath his laurel tree. At the entrance to the Academy, orators will behold Mercury declaiming. Under the portico and in the hall, lawyers and rulers of the people will listen to Jove himself, ordaining laws, pronouncing justice and governing empires. Finally, within the innermost sanctuary, philosophers will acknowledge their Saturn, contemplating the hidden mysteries of the heavens . . .⁵²

Note that the ruler does not occupy the central place in this circle of enlightenment, unless he has chosen to be a philosopher too.

This picture describes the ideal, but what about the reality? Everywhere Ficino continually brings the conversation back to God or back to unity, since he sees no other way of dealing with the evils of life and of transforming situations:⁵³ not by knowledge, not by pleasure, and certainly not by power alone, for 'Power casts us into the most acute and perilous bondage'.⁵⁴ In another letter of the

⁵⁰ Ficino's position is closer to that of James of Viterbo. Compare the summary of the *Philosopher* or *Lover* quoted earlier, *Opera omnia*, p. 1131.

⁵¹ It is notable that rulers with ambitions to play the part of philosopher prince were, in this period, also much taken with the idea of gardens. Matthias Corvinus is said to have reserved a special garden in the grounds of the beautiful palace at Visegrad for the sole use of conversations with his philosophic circle.

⁵² Preface to his *Platonis opera omnia* of 1484, in Ficino, *Opera omnia*, pp. 1129–30.

⁵³ He was conscious that 'It is the duty of a priest to say nothing which does not evidently lead towards love and duty to God', but equally aware that 'it is also the profession of the philosopher to act exactly as he speaks and to speak exactly as he thinks', responding fully to what he observed around him: Letter to Cavalcanti, *Letters*, IV, p. 6.

⁵⁴ Ficino to his friends, *Letters*, IV, p. 8. To attain happiness, or avoid misery, he urges us 'to flee only to that which does not flee anywhere . . . since it fills the universe . . . Then let us not be moved or distracted by many things, but let us remain in unity as much as we are able, since we find eternal unity and the one eternity not through movement or multiplicity, but through being still and being one.' In another letter in similar vein a little later (28 November 1479), written jointly with Giovanni Cavalcanti to Leonardo da Colle, *Letters*, V, pp. 41–42, Ficino speaks of the soul's mid position in the universe, and the need 'in this age of all evils' to turn away from the transient towards the eternal. 'Truly in God alone . . . can the

same period to Cavalcanti (*c.* 1476), he casts doubt on the existence of any effective links between statecraft and philosophy: 'Truth does not dwell in the company of princes; only lies, spiteful criticism and fawning flattery, men pretending to be what they are not and pretending not to be what they are.'⁵⁵

He was constantly aware of the fate that befell philosophers who kept company with potentates: Cicero and Seneca were sent to execution; Callisthenes was thrown to the lions; and even Plato was three times in danger of death through his dealings with Dionysius, father and son, the tyrants of Syracuse.⁵⁶ Ficino warns, 'Let no one be so ignorant of man's capacity as to believe that he can play the part of philosopher fitly and freely, and at the same time live with safety and serenity in the company of princes.'⁵⁷ Yet in practice he did not hold back from offering advice, even if elegant subterfuge was occasionally needed. His frank letter of moral guidance to Cardinal Riario is apparently penned by Truth,⁵⁸ and his philosophical first-aid course for King Ferrante of Naples comes in the form of a transcript of a message from the angelic world, from the king's own father Alfonso the Magnanimous.⁵⁹ Moreover the three versions of his 1478 letter to Pope Sixtus IV reveal a certain degree of prudence in exhorting the Pope to desist from divisive measures and the pursuit of war against Florence, and to recall the proper duty of his office: 'Remember that you are the vicar of Christ, who is most mild and merciful . . . forget injury . . . your victory rests not in war but in peace.'⁶⁰

This letter defends Lorenzo ('a certain ram among us') and dwells on the image of sheep and the good shepherd. He calls on the pope to 'Strike out your name from the book of infamy', reassuring him

cure for all evils be found'. Cavalcanti (1444–1509) was a Florentine statesman and diplomat of considerable scholarship himself, and a lifelong friend of Ficino, though Ficino often complains how rarely he replies to letters.

⁵⁵ *Letters*, IV, pp. 30–32.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31. Cicero, a source for us of Platonic philosophy in Rome, was executed on the orders of the future Augustus in 43 BC; Seneca, wise tutor to a corrupt youth, Nero, was forced to commit suicide in AD 65; Callisthenes, a Greek historian, offended Alexander the Great by criticizing his adoption of oriental ways, and was thrown into prison in 328 BC. Plato's narrow escapes are described in his *Epistle VII*, 349 ff.

⁵⁷ *Letters*, IV, p. 32.

⁵⁸ *Letters*, IV, pp. 37–42.

⁵⁹ *Letters*, V, p. 23. In Shakespeare, the ghost of Hamlet's father plays a similar role.

⁶⁰ *Letters*, V, pp. 4 and 7.

that his name is already inscribed in the book of life by God, and 'the iron sword in the hands of the soldiers of Constantine will be turned away from your fold and against the barbarian wolves'. Finally he pleads, 'O our Sixtus, stop this great conflict now', so that flock and shepherd may together return to their proper roles.

Whether Ficino actually dared to send this particular letter—strong words from a humble priest to his ultimate superior—is not known, and he wrote immediately afterwards to Giovanni Niccolini, Archbishop of Amalfi and his patron at Rome, that 'it is not safe to blame princes; nor is it right to blame fortune'.⁶¹ But he did send two further letters, one of which he definitely wanted read to the Pope at some propitious moment, letters which strike a more positive tone, hoping to call forth in the Pope those very qualities that seemed to be lacking, and attributing to him a favourable response:

Sixtus rising up as the Phoenix of theology, and holding first place in the lofty citadels of Pallas, there has recourse to the word of God on every question . . . How complete is his victory as he binds all hearts to himself by love . . . free minds by their nature certainly cannot be won over in any way other than by freely given kindness . . .⁶²

Then Sixtus responds,

Peace be with you my children. Cruel fates, be gone from my people. . . . Take your ferocious arms of war away from my flock at once. Turn yourselves upon the barbarian wolves.⁶³

The Turks are the enemy, but with one fold under one shepherd, the iron age will soon be turned to gold. The letter ends in a paean to the Almighty, quoting freely from the psalms.

The third letter to the Pope is dated just a few weeks earlier, and is the most succinct of the three and perhaps the only version actually delivered. It praises the pope for his powers of forgiveness, anchors itself in references to the gospels of John and Matthew, and speaks of the tradition of the apostles as fishers of men, with three kinds of bait, and three kinds of net. The baits are attitude, integrity and example; the nets are love, compassion and service.

What we can see in the evolution of these three letters is the gift of a teacher, earnestly seeking common ground, supporting every

⁶¹ *Letters*, V, pp. 10–11.

⁶² *Letters*, V, p. 16.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

positive endeavour so that the necessary change or development might naturally come about. Even if they did not all three find their way into the pope's hands, they were certainly in circulation by 1488 and published in print, along with his other letters, by 1495.

In the same book (*Liber VI*),⁶⁴ Ficino appeals to the other protagonists in the war, Ferrante, King of Naples, and Lorenzo de' Medici. To Ferrante he sent, via the king's son, Cardinal Giovanni of Aragon, a wonderful summary of philosophical teaching in the form of a prophecy from Alfonso,⁶⁵ describing the descent of the soul, the essence of the soul as divine mind, its connection with the immortal source, and its proper homeland. He speaks of fate, destiny and freedom and how to avoid the perils devised by Saturn and Mars, and suddenly switches to very immediate political advice:

Be wholly content with the territories you have . . . Men you pursue with violence will certainly flee from you; yet if ever they gain power, . . . they will perhaps put you to flight. But those you treat with kindness will willingly follow and serve you . . . You will rule free from all troubles only while you rule willing subjects. It will be easy for you to move everyone wherever you wish if you yourself are never moved . . . When Mars rages most, Fortune wields most power and deceives with the greatest ease.⁶⁶

He then returns to the theme of man's ultimate aim in life, the inner rather than the outer conquest—the 'bliss beyond compare'.⁶⁷

To fulfil his role as ruler, a prince would thus need a clear mind and a strong spirit. This is to be inculcated by education, a scheme for which is hinted at in *The Praise of Philosophy*, a letter written to Bernardo Bembo in 1474 or 1475.⁶⁸ It brings together the long divided opposites of contemplation and action, where through training and practice in contemplation, God becomes 'the light and eye'

⁶⁴ Volume V of the English translation.

⁶⁵ *Letters*, V, p. 24.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶⁸ The areas to be covered are moral conduct, natural sciences, mathematics and metaphysics. In a letter to the Count of Gazzoldo, *On the Platonic nature, instruction and function of a philosopher*, written in the late 1470s, Ficino gives a slightly different scheme in more detail. Moral education consists of ethics, for which a youth is prepared by letters, music and gymnastics. Mathematics would follow, in all its branches, leading to astronomy and music; then dialectic and metaphysics. These will develop judgement and allow contemplation of the good and the teaching of true laws and principles. *Letters*, III, pp. 29–30. Cf. Plato, *Laws*, VII, 810–22.

of contemplation, and contemplation serves as 'the light and eye' of action.⁶⁹

To the young Riario, he spells all this out in practical terms:⁷⁰ he must learn to avoid flatterers, to see through the corruption of those robbers of the Church among the high cardinals, to regard his staff with love and justice, knowing that they are in reality no different from himself. He urges him to avoid both contempt and envy and to conquer both anger and partiality, warning him:

No great man ought to believe that his conduct can in any way be hidden . . . Since it is very difficult for a prince to conceal himself from others, let him see that nothing at all lies hidden either in private or in public life.⁷¹

Then would his house

be a temple of God. Let it be the eye of prudence, the scales of justice, the seat of fortitude, let it be an example of moderation, a standard of integrity, the splendour of love, the source of the Graces and the chorus of the Muses. Let it be a school for orators and poets, a shrine for philosophers and theologians and a council chamber for the wise. Let it be a nursery of genius, a reward for the learned, a table for the poor, the hope of the good, a refuge for the innocent and a stronghold for the oppressed.⁷²

This is an image of the Renaissance court *par excellence*, but an image based too on biblical themes, especially those deployed in the book of Proverbs. It presupposes order and rank, yet it does not rule out the concept of brotherhood. Writing to Tommaso Minerbetti in 1474, Ficino said that the chief virtue is humanity, 'which loves and cares for all men as though they were brothers, born of one father in a long succession'.⁷³ His willingness to offer advice which was not always especially welcome shows that Ficino took the duty of Platonic counselling seriously. He was outspoken in his critique of wrongs, but at the same time supportive, regardless of any loss or gain to himself. To Riario, he kept writing despite the lack of any manifest response.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ *Letters*, I, p. 189.

⁷⁰ 'Truth addresses Cardinal Riario on the education of a ruler', 27 January 1478, *Letters*, IV, pp. 37–42.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁷³ *Letters*, I, p. 101.

⁷⁴ In *Letters*, V, pp. 11–12, he complains of hearing nothing, and asks Archbishop Niccolini to act as intermediary. But in V, pp. 53–54, he presumes continued friend-

He consistently declined a place at the Hungarian court,⁷⁵ yet felt free to promote the cause of others there,⁷⁶ and continued to supply those works from which he felt the king would benefit, admonishing Bandini to present them in a suitable way.⁷⁷ He remained grateful and devoted to the Medici but entirely independent in his thinking, and reluctant to ask for material help for himself.⁷⁸

His advice to princes was given in all earnestness and insofar as it was personal advice, it consisted of considered responses to individual problems offered as and when the occasion arose. As both Christian and Platonist, he was acutely sensitive to the stark contrast between the evils of the world in which he lived and the blessings of the divine world, and he duly exploited his rhetorical skill on various occasions to invoke those blessings. We should not forget the backdrop to his writings: factional politics, local wars, plague, death and poverty, corruption in public life, a looming Turkish threat and other ills. Despite all this he maintained his faith in the unity of mankind, and in the power of love, both human and divine, to redeem and heal. This impelled him towards the world of action, to provide wise counsel and practical theology on the grounds that, while writing was only the 'ornament of philosophy', true philosophy was 'integrity of life'.⁷⁹

ship. Ficino may have helped secure Riario's release from prison following the Pazzi conspiracy. His long-standing attempts to offer friendly guidance to Riario, who could justifiably be regarded as an enemy of the Medici, are just one example among many of Ficino's independence of party alignment.

⁷⁵ See the forthcoming *Letters*, VII, letter 43 (*Opera omnia*, p. 884).

⁷⁶ Commending Bandini and Acciaiuoli to the king, and writing three times via Bandini and once to the king himself to secure the release and compensation of the priest Vincenzo. *Letters*, VII, nos 31, 35 and 53 (*Opera omnia*, pp. 880, 881 and 888).

⁷⁷ *Letters*, VI, p. 44.

⁷⁸ See *Letters*, VII, nos 24 and 36a (*Opera omnia*, p. 874 and Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, I, p. 57).

⁷⁹ The letter of 1492 to Martin Uranius (Martin Prenninger of Konstanz, at the court of Eberhard of Württemberg), *Opera omnia*, p. 936. Cf. Plato, *Epistles*, VII, 341c-d.

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THE PLATONIC ACADEMY OF FLORENCE

Arthur Field

For centuries scholars have labelled the Ficino circle in Florence the 'Platonic Academy'. Some have naïvely treated it like a modern academy, with membership lists, regularly scheduled meetings, and a meeting house—the sort of academy that has thrived in Tuscany for nearly half a millennium. Less ingenuous scholars have decided that Ficino's academy needs a gloss, with quotation marks ('the Platonic "Academy"'), or a qualifier—'the so-called Platonic Academy'. Now James Hankins has argued that the Platonic Academy is simply a myth. When Ficino refers to his Academy as a particular devotion to Platonic philosophy, according to Hankins, he is using the term academy as a metaphor for the books of Plato; when Ficino refers to the Academy as an institution, namely the students he is instructing, he means his school in Florence, more or less part of the University of Florence, where Platonism is not the focus.

In two recent studies, 'Cosimo de' Medici and the "Platonic Academy"',¹ and 'The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence',² Hankins scrutinizes a great number of sources and reaches a number of interesting conclusions. Most of these I agree with entirely. Many I myself had made earlier.³ He argues, for instance, that Cosimo de' Medici lacked the necessary cultural preparation to determine in any significant way the contours of Ficino's Platonic philosophy.⁴ Ficino's Platonism was not part of a Medici master-plan, or even a more nebulous Medicean tendency, to create a depolitized villa-centered culture, and Ficino's teaching took place in the heart of Florence.⁵ Moreover, Ficino served the young Florentines not as a mold of professional Platonists but as a sort of Socrates

¹ *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 53 (1990), pp. 144–62.

² *Renaissance Quarterly*, 44 (1991), pp. 429–75.

³ *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence*, Princeton, 1988.

⁴ 'Cosimo and the "Academy"', esp. pp. 146–49; cf. Field, *Origins of the Platonic Academy*, esp. pp. 9, 10–14.

⁵ 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', esp. pp. 449–57; cf. Field, *Origins of the Platonic Academy*, esp. pp. 200–01.

figure, questioning their values and leading them toward virtue.⁶ Yet I disagree with Hankins in a few areas as well, which I shall outline here, and I see no reason whatever to abandon the term 'Platonic Academy' when referring to the Ficino circle.

But what is this circle? This is the crux of Hankins's argument. In the 1490s, Ficino wrote out for a German, Martin Prenninger, a list of his associates. These he divided into three groups: first, the Medicean patrons; second, his *familiares* or *confabulatores*, his associates or equals; and third, those who were more or less his students (*quasi discipuli*).⁷ Hankins notes that it is only these last that he calls elsewhere *academici*, that is, his students at the university.⁸ Here I think Hankins may be correct.

When Ficino refers to his *academia* as an institution, according to Hankins, he is referring to his school at the University of Florence (or, more generally, to the university itself).⁹ He writes, 'there is no compelling reason to qualify Ficino's academy [of the University of Florence] as a "Platonic" academy'.¹⁰ There is a smattering of documentation tying Ficino to the Florentine Studio, from 1451, when as a struggling student of medicine he supported himself by tutoring, probably in logic, to 1499, when, on his death, the *Ufficiali dello Studio* became involved in his funeral preparations.¹¹ Jonathan Davies recently discovered the only document indicating that Ficino actually taught at the Studio. It dates to 1466, when Ficino was paid forty florins for his lectures in philosophy for that year.¹²

Let us look first at these public lectures. According to Hankins, '[g]iven the small sum Ficino was paid, . . . the lectures were probably not on Plato but on some basic logic or natural philosophy text'.¹³ But this is 1466, when Ficino, now under Medici patronage,

⁶ 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', pp. 461–63; cf. Field, *Origins of the Platonic Academy*, pp. 195–96.

⁷ *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basel, 1576; repr. Turin, 1959 etc., pp. 936–37.

⁸ 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', pp. 443–44.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 445–49.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 458.

¹¹ Samuel J. Hough, 'An Early Record of Marsilio Ficino', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 30 (1977), pp. 301–04; for the funeral, see the testimony cited by Hankins, 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', p. 454, n. 85; for a summary of Ficino and the university, see *ibid.*, pp. 449–455.

¹² 'Marsilio Ficino: Lecturer at the Studio fiorentino', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 45 (1992), pp. 785–90.

¹³ 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', p. 450, n. 70.

was more than halfway through the first draft of his translation of the Platonic dialogues.¹⁴ It is not 1451, when Ficino was a student, anticipating a career in medicine, and supporting himself at the university by tutoring Piero dei Pazzi. At the same time, in 1466 Ficino was in his early thirties, known to many but not yet famous, a recipient of some Medici patronage but by no means ready to command the prestigious university salaries of one or two hundred florins. Forty florins was about right, about the same as what Landino, also in his early thirties, was paid a decade earlier, when he gave some Platonizing lectures on Dante.¹⁵

Even if there were no evidence besides the document discovered by Jonathan Davies, I think we would want to conclude that Ficino in the 1460s was lecturing on Plato, or on Platonists. But we have other evidence. Ficino's sixteenth-century biographer, Giovanni Corsi, states that in the time of Piero de' Medici Ficino lectured on Plato's *Philebus* at the University of Florence.¹⁶ Corsi may have got a number of things wrong. But he has recently been proven right in one other notable detail. He said that Ficino was given his *villino* in Careggi when he translated Hermes Trismegistus, that is, no earlier than April 1463.¹⁷ This was considered to be nearly a year off until recently discovered documents confirmed him.¹⁸ Likewise Corsi's statement that Ficino lectured publicly at the University seemed fanciful until Jonathan Davies found the evidence.¹⁹ That Ficino's lectures were on Plato's *Philebus*, as Corsi states, would seem probable.

¹⁴ James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Leiden etc., 1990, p. 301.

¹⁵ Arthur Field, 'Cristoforo Landino's First Lectures on Dante', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 39 (1986), pp. 16-48, esp. pp. 33-34.

¹⁶ Giovanni Corsi, *Vita Marsilii Ficini*, in Raymond Marcel, *Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499)*, Paris, 1958, pp. 679-89: 'Publice itaque eo tempore [sc. Petri Medicis] Marsiliius magna auditorum frequentia Platonis *Philebum* interpretatus est . . .' (p. 683). For an English version, see *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by members of the Language Department, School of Economic Science, London, 6 vols to date, London, 1975-, III, pp. 133-53, the passage at p. 139. I believe that lecturing *publice* in this period always meant lectures under public auspices, that is, at a university or Studium. Some modern studies of Ficino refer to his 'public lectures' on the *Philebus* without suggesting that these were in fact university lectures.

¹⁷ *Vita*, p. 682.

¹⁸ *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Mostra di manoscritti, stampe e documenti, 17 maggio-16 giugno 1984*, ed. by S. Gentile, S. Niccoli and P. Viti, Florence, 1984, pp. 175-76, no. 140.

¹⁹ Arnaldo Della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia platonica di Firenze*, Florence, 1902; repr. Turin, 1968, pp. 568-72, examined the testimony of Corsi and a Laurentian

And for this there is other, compelling evidence. An extant draft of Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Philebus*, datable to the mid- to late 1460s and edited some time ago by Michael Allen, has the form of *reportationes* of lectures, or *collecta cursim ex lectionibus*, as the title and colophon state.²⁰ In his inaugural oration or orations before these lectures (mostly two *accessus*, that is, *De philosophia* and a *Vita Platonis*), Ficino stated that he was giving these lectures 'since our best citizens have desired it' (*cum optimis civibus nostris placuerit*) 'at this celebrated place' (*celebri hoc in loco*).²¹ The term *optimi cives* in itself, with the lectures coming at their behest, suggests public lectures; the 'celebrated place' may refer to the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Florence, or perhaps the convent's Rotunda designed by Brunelleschi.²² Ficino had a draft of these lectures sent to his friend and student, Michele Mercati.²³ We know from a letter of Ficino to Mercati, dated 1 April 1466, that Mercati was then in Volterra.²⁴ And we have other evidence that Mercati was following closely Ficino's work on Plato, since he had with him a draft of Ficino's Latin translation of Plato's dialogues, as yet in unedited form. Ficino's letter to Mercati states that Migliore Cresci will be going to Volterra and desires to consult this translation. Ficino identifies Cresci as his student, or *academiae tutor*, as the letter states, and he is to be allowed

manuscript of Ficino's commentary on the *Philebus* and concluded that Ficino never lectured at the Florentine Studio. Perhaps Della Torre's extraordinary authority led to a general acceptance of this opinion over the last century. But according to Della Torre's summary of earlier conclusions (pp. 568–70), most scholars before him assumed that Ficino lectured at the Studio. Angelo Maria Bandini was one of them. In his edition of Corsi's *Vita* of Ficino, at the passage mentioning the public lectures, Bandini writes as follows: 'Munus publice docendi Philosophiam in Academia Florentina Marsilius a Cosimo accepit, et diligenter exercuit, summa fide, et industria, summoque auditorum progressu exornavit' (*Commentarius de platonicae philosophiae post renatas litteras apud Italos instauratione sive Marsilii Ficini vita*, Pisa, 1771; repr. *Manuscripta* microfilm collection of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana), 1959, list 9, no. 26, p. 26, n. 20.

²⁰ Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, ed. and tr. by Michael J. B. Allen, Berkeley and London, 1975, pp. 71, 439.

²¹ P. O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2 vols, Florence, 1937; repr. Florence, 1973, I, p. 79.

²² For Ficino and Santa Maria degli Angeli, see P. O. Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, 4 vols, Rome, 1956–96, I, p. 111, and especially Michael Allen's remarks in Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, pp. 8–9 and notes.

²³ Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, p. 381.

²⁴ Ed. by P. O. Kristeller in his *Marsilio Ficino and his Work after Five Hundred Years*, Florence, 1987, pp. 18–19.

to look at the text but not copy from it.²⁵ For Hankins's hypothesis to work we would need two extraordinary coincidences. While Ficino was lecturing on 'logic and natural philosophy' at the Studio, he was giving private but formal lectures on Plato's *Philebus* 'since our best citizens have desired it'. Secondly, Ficino's student at the Studio, Migliore Cresci, was so moved by Ficino's lectures in 'logic and natural philosophy' that he would wish to consult, in Volterra, Ficino's translation of Plato.

One other problem with Hankins's thesis is that the salary report names Ficino as a lecturer 'in philosophy' (*in filosofia*). Although logic is usually considered part of philosophy, Studio appointments in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Florence carefully distinguished logic from philosophy, whether in hiring, salary allocations, or other records.²⁶ Had Ficino been lecturing on logic and natural philosophy, the listing would surely have been 'in loica et filosofia' (or perhaps 'in loica et fisica'). The only reason not to consider Ficino's lectures to be on Plato is that the first public, that is, university, lectures on Plato are usually dated to a later period.²⁷ Indeed Ficino may have been publicly funded for these lectures for one year only.²⁸

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁶ In the major documentary sources for the Studio, I found no exceptions to this: *Statuti della Università e Studio Fiorentino dell'anno MCCCCLXXXVII seguiti da un'appendice di documenti dal MCCCXX al MCCCCLXXII*, ed. by Alessandro Gherardi, Florence, 1881; repr. Sala Bolognese, 1973; Armando F. Verde, *Lo Studio fiorentino, 1473-1503: Ricerche e Documenti*, 5 vols, Florence, 1973-94; Katherine Park, 'Readers at the Florentine Studio According to Comunal [*sic*] Fiscal Records (1357-1380, 1413-1446)', *Rinascimento*, 2a ser., 20 (1980), pp. 249-310; Jonathan Davies, *Florence and its University during the Early Renaissance*, Leiden etc., 1998.

²⁷ The earliest university lectures on Plato were previously dated to the 1490s, with regular ones only in the latter half of the sixteenth century. See Charles B. Schmitt, 'L'Introduction de la philosophie platonicienne dans l'enseignement des universités à la Renaissance', in *Platon et Aristote à la Renaissance: XVI^e Colloque International de Tours*, Paris, 1976, pp. 93-104, reprinted in his *Studies in Renaissance Philosophy and Science*, London, 1981, no. III, and Hankins, *Plato*, I, pp. 98-99. But cf. my remarks above, notes 16 and 19.

²⁸ This could help explain the confusing testimony concerning the interruption of Ficino's commentary on the *Philebus* in the 1460s: see Michael Allen's remarks in Ficino, *The 'Philebus' Commentary*, pp. 10-11. An interruption in the lectures on the *Philebus* could have been due to any number of the following factors: (1) a political crisis in Florence, with the putsch against Piero de' Medici in 1466; (2) a spiritual crisis of Ficino (mentioned by Ficino's early biographer Giovanni Corsi and much discussed since; see now Hankins, *Plato*, II, pp. 454-59); (3) a negative public reaction to Ficino's lectures due to their obscurity or opacity, a thesis advanced by Michael J. B. Allen, 'Ficino's Lecture on the Good?', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 30

But what else, besides 'logic and natural philosophy' (for which there is no evidence), was Ficino teaching in his school? Hankins considers the scattered testimonies of Ficino's teaching in Florence and concludes that 'there is no compelling reason to qualify Ficino's academy as a "Platonic" academy'. Besides Platonism, according to Hankins, Ficino taught 'vernacular literature, the Bible, astrology, and "spiritual medicine"'.²⁹ This point I think should be questioned. Ficino evidently had a school of sorts, apparently located in Florence, for many years. As far as we know now, during one year only was he on a public salary. To me it is utterly inconceivable that at this school in Florence Plato would not be the focus. Where in Ficino's work after about 1460 is there not Platonism? If, as Hankins argues, Ficino was not lecturing on Platonism but on 'vernacular literature', what was he lecturing on? The poets Guido Cavalcanti and Dante? They are clearly Platonic. What about the Bible? St Paul is Platonic, and other texts are also—or, at least they share common assumptions or a common revelation. Astrology? Astrology is Platonic. 'Spiritual medicine'? That is perhaps the most obviously Platonic of all.³⁰

But let us look at Ficino's 'academy' in action. 'Most vivid', according to Hankins, 'is the testimony of a dialogue' written by Benedetto Colucci, his *Declamationes*, dedicated to Giuliano de' Medici.³¹ Set at the end of 1474, the *Declamationes* 'depict the activities of Ficino's

(1977), pp. 160–71, esp. pp. 167–68; and (4) a negative public reaction to paganizing lectures in a Florentine church, Santa Maria degli Angeli (plausible, but for this there is no direct evidence). As for the last of these, we know such lectures were controversial in later years: see the letter of Pietro Dolfino (or Piero Delfino) of 1487, in Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, II, pp. 233–34; see also Hankins, *Plato*, I, p. 348, and now Michael J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Florence, 1998, esp. chs 1–2.

²⁹ 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', pp. 458–59.

³⁰ That Ficino's interest in biblical, astrological, and 'spiritual-medical' teachings was wholly connected to his Platonic philosophy is so manifest in his many works, and so characteristic of scholars' discussions of these works, that I shall not attempt to provide documentation here. As for the Tuscan poets, Ficino in his *De amore* has Cristoforo Marsuppini explain at length how Guido Cavalcanti 'hunc amorem Socraticum tam moribus quam carminibus imitatus' (*Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, ed. and tr. by Raymond Marcel, Paris, 1956, in the seventh oration; quotation at p. 239). In his translation of Dante's *Monarchia*, 1468, Ficino wrote that Dante 'di molte sententie Platoniche adornò e libri suoi', . . . 'con vaso di Virgilio beendo alle Platoniche fonti' (Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, II, p. 184). For Ficino and the poets, see P. O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. by Virginia Conant, 1943; repr. Gloucester, Mass., 1964, p. 287 (the Italian version, *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino*, 1953; rev. edn, Florence, 1989, has better indices and more of the original texts), and Field, 'Landino's First Lectures', pp. 36–38.

³¹ 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', p. 445. The *Declamationes* are in *Scritti inediti*

academy' and constitute 'the only vivid description we possess of the activities of a group identified as Ficino's academy (not, needless to say, his "Platonic academy")'.³² Five noble Florentine youths deliver 'practice orations (*declamationes*) in which they encourage the princes of Italy to take up arms against the Turk'.³³ Ficino is 'clearly the mentor of the five youths (whom he calls "academici"): it is Ficino who . . . had allotted to each the task of delivering his oration; it is he who commends the youths after their performance and who sets the order of delivery'.³⁴ At this point Hankins does not provide a fuller explanation, although clearly he is implying that this is a school of rhetoric. Later in his essay he is more explicit: 'the most detailed portrait we have of Ficino's gymnasium shows it engaged in rhetorical practice on a subject having nothing to do with Platonism'.³⁵

But there is more to these speeches than Hankins indicates. First, the assembled students giving the orations are identified as students of Cristoforo Landino ('clarissimus vates vesterque sanctissimus praeceptor'); hence it is not really Ficino's *academia* at all, but an extraordinary gathering at Ficino's school, whether at Careggi or in Florence, of others from the Florentine Studio.³⁶ Secondly, Ficino is presiding over this group not as the master of his school of rhetoric but as a philosopher. At the very beginning Colucci describes Ficino, *philosophus gravissimus*, as follows: 'in tali viro magna auctoritas sit, apud eos praecipue qui vere philosophiam sectantur'.³⁷ And after the first speech, all are described as immobilized by grief (recent Turkish conquests being an occasion for lamentation); Ficino, however, 'gravioere nos teneri dolore sensit, quam eos qui philosophiam profitentur deceat'.³⁸ Indeed Ficino is here no master of rhetoric but a spiritual leader in Platonic philosophy. And the students, whether moved by Ficino's presence, Landino's indoctrination, or Colucci's imagination, to some extent get the point. Platonic themes appear: to oppose the Turks, the Italian rulers need to cultivate a *concordia* amongst them-

di Benedetto Colucci da Pistoia, ed. by Arsenio Frugoni, Florence, 1939, pp. 1-47 (the author is also known as Benedetto di Coluccio Fetti). See Renzo Ristori in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, XXVII (1982), pp. 494-98, s.v. Colucci.

³² 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', p. 445.

³³ *Ibid.* Also addressed are the republics of Italy and the pope.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 458.

³⁶ *Declamationes*, p. 47.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

selves; *gloria* and *immortalitas* are promised to those who do.³⁹ Indeed Ficino's 'academy' is anything but what Hankins describes it as, namely, a 'gymnasium . . . engaged in rhetorical practice on a subject having nothing to do with Platonism'.⁴⁰

Let us consider also the letter of Ficino to the Venetian Bernardo Bembo. The letter, from the mid-1470s, is addressed to 'the distinguished Venetian nobleman and doctor of law', who had been on a diplomatic mission to Florence.⁴¹ It reads: 'You ask what the Academy does, my Bernardo? It loves Bembo. What else does it do? It reveres Bembo. Every man of letters among us agrees that Bembo above all is worthy of love and reverence, for his breast is the temple of the Graces, and his mind the fount of the Muses', etc.⁴²

Now according to Hankins this Academy seems to refer simply to Ficino's school in Florence.⁴³ And this school had no special connection to Plato: some rhetoric, logic, and tutoring took place there, and this explains why so few professional philosophers were produced by Ficino's academy.⁴⁴ If we assume that Ficino, leading this school of boys, was being paid what he was paid in 1466, his salary was that of a reasonably skilled bricklayer. Now why was Bernardo Bembo, a Venetian knight and ambassador, hanging around Ficino's boys in Florence, and sending inquiries as to whether he was 'loved' by Ficino's school or academy? I would conclude from Hankins's argument that Ficino was running some pederastic club for visiting ambassadors. These boys were informing Bembo that he was truly loved by them.

³⁹ More traditional themes appear also, such as appeals for the exercise of ancient Roman valor against barbarians and for the survival of the Christian religion. To be sure, harmony among rulers and glory for the virtuous are traditional themes as well, and I confess that I would not regard them as Platonic were Ficino not present. The last speech, by Carlo Marsuppini the younger to the Florentine government, pp. 39–46, has a more philosophical tone than the others.

⁴⁰ 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', p. 458.

⁴¹ Ficino, *Opera omnia*, p. 730; *Letters*, II, p. 25, no. 18; Hankins, 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', p. 447.

⁴² Tr. by the Language Department, School of Economic Science, London (*Letters*, as note 41).

⁴³ 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', pp. 447–48.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 449. I and others have also noted the rarity of professional philosophers coming out of the Ficino circle. I would argue that this does not mean that Ficino was not teaching Platonic philosophy but that Ficino did not view himself as being in the business of creating professional philosophers. See my *Origins of the Platonic Academy*, pp. 199–200, the survey of Della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia platonica*, pp. 654–800, and especially Kristeller, *Studies*, I, pp. 112–13.

But why not call this 'Academy' simply the books of Plato? Actually I think this works better for Hankins's thesis. Ficino informs Bembo that the Academy loves him. There is in fact a problem here, for the letter states that 'every man of letters among us' agrees in this. To be sure, this could simply be a metaphor that all of Plato's more learned dialogues agree that they would like to be embraced by Bembo. But why attempt to force these testimonies, when a more literal and natural interpretation of the letter makes perfect sense? Ficino is telling Bembo that he and his fellow Platonists in Florence, that is, the Platonic Academy of Florence, are united to Bembo in Platonic love.

I see no reason not to regard Ficino's Academy, insofar as it consisted of his university students, as a Platonic Academy. Of course this is a different sort of Platonic Academy from what historians have traditionally associated with Ficino, namely a wider group of scholars. In exposing this larger Academy as a myth, Hankins has made a telling point. Ficino does not seem to refer to members of this larger group as *academici*; rather they are *familiares* or *confabulatores*, many of whom, he wrote Prenninger, 'listened sometimes to my first lectures'.⁴⁵ This is the group that scholars have incorrectly called an Academy.⁴⁶

In those texts where Ficino appears to be referring to an Academy in a wider sense, he is actually, according to Hankins, using the word *Academy* as a metaphor for the books of Plato. Here the evidence Hankins cites seems to work: come to the Academy, Ficino states, and there you will find . . .; and Ficino goes on to outline Plato's teachings.⁴⁷

But here I think we should keep well in mind what should by now be familiar to all, that is, Ficino's historical position, and his conception of it. There is no need to go over the details of it. The question has been handled well by Paul Kristeller and others.⁴⁸ The gist of it is that there were not simply the books of Plato being read in various ages, or manuscripts being passed down through the generations; rather, there were leading, magisterial interpretations of these books, scholars, commentators, and schools. At various stages

⁴⁵ *Opera omnia*, pp. 936-37.

⁴⁶ 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', esp. pp. 442-44.

⁴⁷ 'Cosimo and the "Academy"'.

⁴⁸ See especially Kristeller, *Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, ch. 2, 'Ficino's Historical Position', pp. 10-29, and now Allen, *Synoptic Art*, esp. chs 1-2.

in history there were interpretations of Plato, led by a master and diffused through disciples, sometimes defined as a school and sometimes as those 'influenced'. This is the history of the Academy, and this is the Platonic Academy in Ficino's Florence, the ancient Academy brought back to life.⁴⁹ It is not simply the books of Plato. I do not think that Ficino would have believed that there was an Academy of Petrarch, merely because Petrarch had a copy of most of Plato's dialogues, in a Greek manuscript he could not read, although I do not deny that Ficino could have used Hankins's metaphor, even here, in reference to some sort of a dormant 'academy'.

The Academy is not simply the books of Plato, but the books of Plato and the Platonists as interpreted by Marsilio Ficino, and this interpretation had an extraordinary influence on Ficino's students and *familiars*, an informal association of scholars, united by their interest in Plato as Plato was being explained by Ficino and hence united also in Platonic love—this was the loose association Ficino regarded as his Academy, the revived Platonic Academy.

Now, why did Ficino, in his letter to Martin Prenninger, not refer to this wider circle of scholars as the Platonic Academy of Florence, an association of erudites of which he was the head? Why do references to the *Academy* in the wider sense also seem to refer to, or be able to refer to, the books of Plato, not to Ficino's school?

Let us look at one of these *familiars*, Cristoforo Landino, nearly always regarded in the secondary literature as deeply influenced by Ficino and hence a leading intellectual of the Platonic Academy. Almost a decade older than Ficino, Landino was in the mid-1450s a rising star in the intellectual world of Florence. He was a leading candidate to replace Carlo Marsuppini as the premier lecturer in humanities at the university. He was close to the Florentine chancellor, Poggio, as well as to Cosimo de' Medici and his son Piero, and he knew Leon Battista Alberti, marrying into a branch of the Alberti family in the late 1450s. Landino probably did not know Greek very well, but he had a wide knowledge of Latin literature, including philosophical sources.⁵⁰

By the mid-1450s Landino came to know Marsilio Ficino, and Ficino acknowledged Landino's help with Latin Platonic sources in

⁴⁹ Kristeller, *Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, p. 22.

⁵⁰ Field, *Origins of the Platonic Academy*, pp. 232–39; idem, 'Landino's First Lectures', pp. 27–28.

his early major work, the lost *Institutiones ad Platonicam disciplinam*, dedicated to Landino in 1456. Landino in turn was much influenced by Ficino, and I strongly suspect that Landino's extant inaugural oration on Dante at the University of Florence, reflecting Ficino's Platonism, was delivered in 1456. It is nearly identical in parts to Ficino's letter *De divino furore*, dated to the fall of 1457, and I suspect that both derive from Ficino's *Institutiones ad Platonicam disciplinam*.⁵¹

If Landino was strongly influenced by Ficino, as is clear also in Landino's later works, why would Ficino not list him among the members of his Academy? Hankins answer to this is clear: the Academy is a fiction, and when Ficino refers to his Platonic influence he is merely referring to the 'books of Plato'.

But here I would suggest an alternative explanation. If Ficino had labelled Landino as a member of his 'Academy', he would have been labelling him as his student. Landino was nearly a decade older than Ficino, had a much higher university salary, was married into a respectable Florentine family, was chancellor of the Parte Guelfa, aspired to be Chancellor of Florence, and had served, for a time, as Ficino's mentor.⁵² Ficino, on the other hand, unlike many he influenced, lacked a prestigious social background.⁵³ His students proper, especially younger ones, he could label his students or *academici*. Others he would label *familiares* or *confabulatores*, fellow learners from the wellspring of human and divine knowledge, the books of Plato. Ficino knew his interpretation was opening up the books of Plato and the Platonists. But to call those who learned from him members of his *Academy* would, simply, have been impolite.

Indeed, as Hankins notes, Ficino's close friend and fellow Platonist Giovanni Cavalcanti moves from being termed an *academicus* in Ficino's early writings to being a *confabulator* in Ficino's letter to Prenninger.⁵⁴ Hankins's explanation for this is, I think, correct: 'By 1491 Ficino may have thought it more appropriate to class Cavalcanti as an old friend and occasional student than to relegate one of his oldest and dearest friends, now a distinguished statesman, to the category of pupil.'⁵⁵ The use of the term *academicus*, then, is largely a question

⁵¹ Field, 'Landino's First Lectures', esp. pp. 34–35.

⁵² Field, *Origins of the Platonic Academy*, pp. 232–39.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 61–62 and 177–78; cf. Hankins, *Plato*, p. 277.

⁵⁴ Hankins, 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', p. 444.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

of courtesy. The term would be inappropriate for an older, established scholar, or for most members of the Florentine elite. One could still use the term *academy* as something all were fellow members of, Ficino included, and here all would defer to the common master, Plato himself. Such references to this academy would thus appear indistinguishable from references to the books of Plato.

I shall not attempt to take up the question of whether Cosimo had nurtured a long desire to create a Platonic renewal in Florence. In 1988 I argued that Cosimo's role in the whole story had been exaggerated, and that he was in no position whatsoever to shape formally in any significant way the direction Ficino's thought would take.⁵⁶ Hankins underscored that opinion in his article of 1990.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, it is possible that Plato's works did have a special appeal for Cosimo. This is still an open question.⁵⁸ In his introduction to

⁵⁶ Field, *Origins of the Platonic Academy*, esp. pp. 9, 10–14.

⁵⁷ Hankins, 'Cosimo and the "Academy"', esp. pp. 146–49.

⁵⁸ Hankins, *ibid.*, pp. 148–49 emphasizes Cosimo's closeness to Aristotelians, namely Leonardo Bruni, Carlo Marsuppini, Johannes Argyropoulos, and Niccolò Tignosi, and he notes that Cosimo in his last days was consoled not only by Ficino's Platonic dialogues and Orphic lyre but by Donato Acciaiuoli's explanation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, based on the lectures of the Aristotelian Johannes Argyropoulos.

Leonardo Bruni made translations and commentaries of Aristotle's moral philosophy, and Hankins has argued at length that Cosimo was quite close to this important early humanist ('The Humanist, the Banker and the Condottiere: An Unpublished Letter of Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici Written by Leonardo Bruni', in *Renaissance Society and Culture: Essays in Honor of Eugene F. Rice, Jr.*, ed. by John Monfasani and Ronald G. Musto, New York, 1991, pp. 59–70). But other evidence points to a coolness and perhaps even hostility in their relations: see now my 'Leonardo Bruni, Florentine Traitor? Bruni, the Medici, and an Aretine Conspiracy of 1437', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 51 (1998), pp. 1109–50, esp. p. 1115 ff. Cosimo was certainly close to Carlo Marsuppini. Although Hankins labels Marsuppini an 'Aristotelian', and this label appears often in the secondary literature, I have seen no evidence that he actually was, and I am not sure that there is enough extant evidence to make such a determination. Marsuppini was famous for his poetry and 'universal learning', and especially for his knowledge of Roman law. Cosimo indeed supported the popular Aristotelian Johannes Argyropoulos, although this may have been an attempt to accommodate Florentine political forces and block the Studio appointment of Francesco Filelfo (see my *Origins of the Platonic Academy*, pp. 77–106). Niccolò Tignosi, a lecturer on Aristotle at the Florentine Studio, presumably also won Cosimo's patronage: Tignosi's political realism, ideas on the subordination of means to ends, and notions of public law, to say nothing of his closeness to Poggio, may have been the cause of Cosimo's interest (see *Origins*, pp. 138–58). As for Donato Acciaiuoli's explication of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as Cosimo was nearing death (1463–64), I have argued elsewhere that although Acciaiuoli was a student of Argyropoulos, he was departing from his master in a Platonic direction, perhaps under Ficino's influence, and that it was this new interpretation that Cosimo heard (*Origins of the*

the first volume of his excellent edition of Ficino's letters, Sebastiano Gentile gives Cosimo a major role in the Platonic revival,⁵⁹ and Dennis Lackner, using different evidence, argues similarly.⁶⁰ Ficino himself of course often mentioned Cosimo's extraordinary personal interest in his work. Was this wishful thinking, a speculative search for authenticity, or a ploy for dunning future Medici patrons? According to Hankins, it is 'highly improbable that the aged Cosimo would have entrusted a dreamy, twenty-nine-year-old medical school dropout with a major cultural initiative'.⁶¹ But I think it is even more improbable that an astute businessman like Cosimo would have turned over two houses, one with a farm attached, and a very valuable manuscript of Plato perhaps of equal worth, to a youth whose cultural initiative meant little to him.⁶² Nor do I think we should be swayed

Platonic Academy, pp. 207–22; my discussion is rather superficial or summary, and the question needs to be studied by someone trained in Aristotle and the commentary traditions). The humanist intellectual closest to Cosimo from his early years was surely Niccolò Niccoli, and Niccoli had an exceptional and controversial attachment to Plato. See, for instance, Bruni's letter to Niccoli, 1400, referring to 'Platonem tuum, sic enim placet mihi appellare illum, pro quo tu adversus indoctorum turbam omni tempore pugnavisti' (Bruni, *Epistolarum libri VIII*, ed. by Lorenzo Mehus, 2 vols, Florence, 1741, I, p. 15, *ep.* I.8; Francesco Paolo Luiso, *Studi su l'epistolario di Leonardo Bruni*, ed. by Lucia Gualdo Rosa, Rome, 1980, p. 3, *ep.* I.1 [L.8M]). Also, Cino Rinuccini, in his *Inveittiva contra a certi caluniatori di Dante e di messer Francesco Petrarca e di messer Giovanni Boccaci*, criticizes unnamed humanists for their excessive attachment to Varro (here Niccoli is surely meant) and to Plato (very likely Niccoli), ed. by Alessandro Wesselsky in Giovanni Gherardi da Prato, *Il Paradiso degli Alberti: Ritrovi e ragionamenti del 1389. Romanzo di Giovanni da Prato*, 2 parts, Bologna, 1867, in the series *Scelta di curiosità letterarie*, vol. 86, part 2, pp. 303–16; references at pp. 313, 315. For Niccoli and Varro, see Bruni's *Dialogi* to Pier Paolo Vergerio, in his *Opere letterarie e politiche*, ed. by Paolo Viti, Turin, 1996, p. 100. See also Antonio Lanza, *Polemiche e berte letterarie nella Firenze del primo Rinascimento (1375–1449)*, 2nd edn, Rome, 1989, pp. 129–58, esp. p. 157. Some references on Niccoli are owed to my friend Susanne Saygin of the Humboldt University, Berlin, who is preparing a study of Niccoli's life.

⁵⁹ Ficino, *Lettere*, ed. Gentile, I, pp. XIII–XLV, LXI–LXV.

⁶⁰ In his study, not yet published, of the Florentine Camaldulensians in the Quattrocento. See also Lackner's article in this volume.

⁶¹ "Cosimo and the "Academy"", p. 152.

⁶² For the houses, see *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Mostra*, pp. 174–76, nos 139–40. For the manuscript (Florence, Laur. 85, 9), *ibid.*, pp. 28–31, no. 22, and Sebastiano Gentile, 'Note sui manoscritti greci di Platone utilizzati da Marsilio Ficino', in *Scritti in onore di Eugenio Garin*, preface signed by Claudio Cesa, Pisa, 1987, pp. 51–84. Hankins ('Cosimo and the "Academy"', p. 157) reckons that the manuscript was worth 'far more' than the house and *villino* combined. Gentile (p. 53) notes that Ficino's letter to Cosimo of September 1462 refers to the latter providing *platonica volumina*: hence Cosimo apparently not only gave him the identified Plato but also at least one other volume of Platonic texts.

by the number of Aristotelian works in Cosimo's library, or the Aristotelian dedications to him. Aristotle still dominated much of university education, and such patronage should be expected. If Cosimo's library had more works of Aristotle in it than of Plato, I suspect the same can be said of Ficino's library, and of the libraries of most of us.⁶³ Owners of such libraries could still find Plato more inspiring. If a library in 1430 had one book of Plato and twenty of Aristotle, and in 1460 five books of Plato and twenty of Aristotle, this does not mean that the owner of the latter library is four times as interested in Aristotle as in Plato; it may rather mean that the owner is five times as interested in Plato as might be expected.

Now let me make a remark or two on Careggi, on the inscription of the Academy, and the painting of Democritus and Heraclitus. In my 1988 book, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy in Florence*, I argued that Ficino's connections with Careggi had been grossly exaggerated. I was mainly arguing that Ficino's Platonic doctrines of world renunciation should not be understood as a repudiation of Florentine political and social life in favor of an 'escape to the villa'. I still believed that there was a formal seat of the Academy in Careggi, which had the painting of Democritus and Heraclitus and the Latin inscription. But I also knew, from the evidence published in the exhibition catalogue *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, that Cosimo had not granted Ficino his little villa in Careggi until April of 1463. The previous summer he gave Ficino what Ficino called his Academy in Careggi. This led me to suppose that the real seat of the Academy was in the Medici villa in Careggi.⁶⁴

In his 'Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence', James Hankins likewise dissociated Ficino from his little villa in Careggi, and he showed that the Latin inscription 'on the walls of the Academy', and the painting of Democritus and Heraclitus, had no necessary connection to Careggi: Hankins reveals that the title in the *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 'Inscriptio Academiae Caregianae', for a text of an Italian version of the inscription was supplied by Kristeller.⁶⁵ Hankins suggests that the inscription and painting were on the walls of his

⁶³ Hankins, 'Cosimo and the "Academy"', p. 148: 'Both [Cosimo's] own library and that of his son Piero contained more works of Aristotle than of Plato.'

⁶⁴ *Origins of the Platonic Academy*, pp. 200-01, esp. p. 200, n. 96; *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Mostra*, pp. 175-76, no. 140.

⁶⁵ 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', pp. 448, 456 and n. 90; Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, I, p. 70.

Academy, or classroom, in Florence, and that the latter was not a classroom dedicated to Plato.⁶⁶ I still think that the location of these 'visible signs' of the Academy is an open question, and perhaps some day a sledgehammer into a wall in Florence, or in the outskirts of Florence, will reveal a smiling Democritus.

I do not believe they could have been in Ficino's own house in Florence, since he seems to have rented it out.⁶⁷ Perhaps Hankins is correct that they were in a room in his father's house, which he may have used as a classroom.⁶⁸ Perhaps they were in another lecture hall provided by the university.⁶⁹ Perhaps they were in the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, as Dennis Lackner would prefer.⁷⁰ If Ficino did some teaching in Careggi—and if he did, I suppose it would restrict his students to those who had regular access to horses—then these visible symbols of the Academy could be in a room in the Medici villa, or in Ficino's smaller villa.⁷¹

But even if these symbols adorned the walls of Ficino's school in Florence, they go against Hankins's thesis that this school was not a Platonic one. The inscription on the walls of Ficino's Academy is a Platonic inscription: 'A bono in bonum omnia diriguntur. Laetus in presens. Neque censum aestimes, neque appetas dignitatem. Fuge excessum, fuge negotia. Laetus in presens.'⁷² To be sure, part of the inscription, about enjoying the present (*laetus in praesens*), has an Epicurean ring to it, but this was an Epicureanism that Ficino had long absorbed into his Platonism, and it was a teaching that would appear in Lorenzo de' Medici's 'Quant'è bella giovinezza'.⁷³ As for the painting, Democritus laughing at the earth and Heraclitus weeping over it, this, like the inscription, is simply good old-fashioned

⁶⁶ 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', pp. 448, 457.

⁶⁷ *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Mostra*, pp. 174–75, no. 139; noted by Hankins, 'Myth of the Platonic Academy', p. 457.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Some lectures were surely there. For Lackner's forthcoming study, see n. 60 above.

⁷¹ Sebastiano Gentile examines in detail the literary evidence, as well as the recently discovered documentary evidence (much of which was discovered or first presented by him), and concludes that the inscription and painting on the walls of Ficino's school or academy were at his *villino* in Careggi given to him by Cosimo (Ficino, *Lettere*, ed. Gentile, I, pp. XLIV–XLV, n. 82).

⁷² *Lettere*, ed. Gentile, I, pp. 92–93, no. 47 (*Opera omnia*, p. 609; *Letters*, I, pp. 11–12, no. 5).

⁷³ Field, *Origins of the Platonic Academy*, pp. 183–190; P. O. Kristeller, 'Lorenzo de' Medici platonico' (1938), in his *Studies*, I, pp. 213–19, at p. 218.

Platonic world renunciation. If the inscription and painting appeared in Ficino's classroom in Florence, this surely underscores my hypothesis that in this classroom Ficino was teaching Platonism.⁷⁴

But I think it is entirely possible that I exaggerated or even misstated Ficino's separation from Careggi, and that Hankins, following me, may be in error also. One of the most frequently cited testimonies for Ficino's Academy comes in his letter to Cosimo de' Medici, dated 4 September 1462. In this Ficino thanks Cosimo for his patronage and states, in Hankins's translation: 'I have no way at all of repaying you for such great gifts except by painstakingly devoting myself to those Platonic volumes you have so generously offered me; by duly worshipping at [*or cultivating*] the Academy you have furnished for me, as though it were a kind of shrine for contemplation, in the fields of Careggi; by celebrating the natal day of Plato equally with that of Cosimo de' Medici, "so long as the spirit rules this little body"'.⁷⁵

The whole letter turns on Ficino's search for patronage. He states that he has recently learned from his father that Cosimo was keenly interested in his studies and how he intended to patronize them. For Hankins, Ficino promises duly to worship at or cultivate the Academy in the fields of Careggi, that is, he will translate the books of Plato in the Medici villa there.⁷⁶ But here I think the more literal interpretation of the letter works better. When Ficino promises *legitime colere* the Academy provided for him, I think he is saying he will legally inhabit the *villino* that Cosimo is preparing for him. The expression is 'academiam quam nobis in agro Caregio parasti veluti quoddam contemplationis sacellum legitime colam'.⁷⁷ In another early letter, to Gregorio Befani, Ficino uses again the verb *colere* to refer to his inhabiting the place in Careggi given to him by Cosimo.⁷⁸ In the late summer of 1462, Cosimo has prepared, but not legally handed over, this *villino*; perhaps he awaited a final check on Ficino's abilities as a translator, his translation of Hermes Trismegistus. As

⁷⁴ On the painting, see my *Origins of the Platonic Academy*, pp. 188–89.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Hankins, 'Cosimo and the "Academy"', pp. 149–50; in Latin, *ibid.*, pp. 159–60.

⁷⁶ 'Cosimo and the "Academy"', p. 152.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁷⁸ *Lettere*, I, ed. Gentile, p. 33, no. 10: 'statui tempus aliquod Montem Vechium illum mihi a magno Cosimo donatum colere' (no. 11 in the English *Letters*, I, p. 51). Montevecchio is the hillside region of Ficino's Careggi, as in Lorenzo de' Medici's verses on 'Marsilio abitator del Montevecchio': see *Lettere*, I, pp. XLIV–XLV, n. 82.

for the *sacellum contemplationis* that Ficino will legally inhabit, I think it is even possible that here Ficino is making a little joke. A *sacellum* in antiquity seems to have meant an open-air shrine, or a *locus sine tecto*, 'a place without a roof', as Festus defined it in his *De significatione verborum*, a work, by the way, discovered by Poggio.⁷⁹ What is the little joke, if there is one? Perhaps Cosimo was restoring the *villino* but had not yet put a new roof on it.

To be sure, I do not see how such an interpretation of this letter, which I think is the more probable one, should undermine Hankins's argument. Cosimo is providing, or promising to provide, a Greek manuscript of Plato's dialogues, with a residence in the country to study it, a residence that also will provide a little income. Now I want to conclude this with an appeal to common sense. If Cosimo was providing Ficino with a manuscript of Plato, and a place in the country to study it, what more appropriate metaphor for that retreat could Ficino have found than to call it an Academy? One of Ficino's early mentors, Antonio degli Agli, wrote a dialogue, probably from the late 1450s or early 1460s, entitled *De mystica statera*. Ficino is one of the interlocutors, being scolded by the rather severe Agli. Agli reprimands Ficino for his excessive attachment to the city, with its urban charms. The embarrassed Ficino has to reply that that was true, and 'did not my Plato locate his Academy outside the city, so that he could pursue philosophy?'⁸⁰

Let me recapitulate. Ficino certainly had a school, probably in Florence, which he called an Academy. There he focused on Platonic teachings. He also had a wider circle of those he influenced. At times he seemed to refer to it as an 'Academy', although at other times 'Academy' refers to, or could refer to, the books of Plato. My argument here is simple: if he did not refer to this wider circle as his Academy, it was because he was too polite. He would not describe

⁷⁹ Paul the Deacon's epitome of Festus, that is, in Festus, *De verborum significatione quae supersunt cum Pauli Epitome*, ed. by Wallace M. Lindsay, Leipzig, 1913; repr. Hildesheim, 1965, §§ 464, 465 (318, 319), pp. 422, 423; Remigio Sabbadini, *Le scoperte dei codici latini e greci ne' secoli XIV e XV* (1905), repr. with the author's additions and corrections, ed. by Eugenio Garin, 2 vols, Florence, 1967, I, p. 80.

⁸⁰ Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS VIII F 9, fol. 30v: 'Ipse . . . Plato . . . ut posset vacare philosophie elegit academiam villam ab urbe procul' (Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, II.9 [338], in *Patrologia Latina*, XXIII, col. 298). My emended dating here (cf. my *Origins of the Platonic Academy*, p. 200) is owed to a study by Christopher Celenza, *Piety and Pythagoras in Renaissance Florence: The Symbolum Nesianum*, Leiden, 2001, pp. 26–31.

his fellow scholars, such as Landino, as *his* academics. If he did refer to them as an Academy, that is, as those taught by Plato, it was in the sense of fellow scholars taught under a common master, Plato, even if Ficino knew that he had led the way.

Frankly, in all this, I do not see why we should not take the most obvious position. We can readily use the term *Platonic Academy* as long as we recognize, as most scholars have long recognized, that this Academy had no membership lists or regular organization. As Paul Oskar Kristeller wrote in 1961, in his article entitled 'The Platonic Academy of Florence', 'The Platonic Academy of Florence was not, as historians formerly thought, an organized institution like the academies of the sixteenth century, but merely a circle around Ficino, with no common doctrine except that of Ficino. . . . The name "Academy" was merely adopted in imitation of Plato's Academy'.⁸¹ I think that Kristeller had it about right.

To conclude, the term Platonic Academy is a perfectly appropriate one for the Ficino circle. With respect to his students Ficino used the term 'academy' freely. With the wider world of intellectual associates Ficino was more circumspect and humbly made it clear that the real master of the revived Academy was Plato himself, or Plato living through his books. And discovering the appropriate term, the *Academy*, required no great ingenuity. Let us assume that you are a Platonist, the leader of Platonism in Florence, and the best expositor of Plato in more than a millennium, as Ficino considered himself. Now what would you call the circle you were influencing *except* an Academy?⁸²

⁸¹ Now in Kristeller's *Renaissance Thought and the Arts: Collected Essays*, Princeton, 1990, pp. 89–101 at p. 93.

⁸² That said, I shall concede to Hankins one major point. If an outsider arrived in Florence in 1480 and asked a member of Ficino's circle—whether a student or a *confabulator*—for directions to the 'Platonic Academy', I am persuaded that the Ficinian would react with bewilderment. Some clarification would be needed before the Florentine, now smiling with understanding, would direct the visitor to Marsilio Ficino. Hankins makes much of the fact that references to Ficino's school are to his 'academy' and 'not, needless to say, to his "Platonic academy"' ('Myth of the Platonic Academy', p. 445). Hankins is correct that the term *Platonic Academy* appears only in later centuries: the earliest reference he has found is from 1638 (*ibid.*, p. 430). But this does not necessarily mean, as Hankins suggests, that a myth has been created. Rather, in later periods the term 'Platonic Academy' was needed to distinguish Ficino's academy from the dozens of learned academies created from the sixteenth century onward. That Ficino did not term his academy a *Platonic Academy* does not mean that it was not Platonic; rather, it means that Ficino wished to avoid being redundant.

FICINO IN THE FIRING LINE:
A RENAISSANCE NEOPLATONIST AND HIS CRITICS

Jill Kraye

In mid-September 1489 Marsilio Ficino was frightened that monsters were lurking in wait for him. We learn this from a letter addressed to three friends, all named Piero, which he appended as a postscript to his recently completed *Three Books on Life*, a medico-astrological treatise with the stated aim, which we can still applaud today, of teaching intellectuals how to stay healthy.¹ Ficino tells the three Pieros that the controversial third book, entitled 'On Obtaining Life from the Heavens' and dealing with the manipulation of celestial influences, talismans and suchlike, would no doubt provoke some people to say: 'Marsilio is a priest, is he not? Certainly he is. Well then, what business do priests have with medicine? Or with astrology?' Still others would add: 'What does a Christian have to do with magic or images?'² After defending himself against these charges, Ficino asks his friends to seek out others to plead his case. 'Go now swiftly and summon the Herculean Poliziano', he tells Piero Guicciardini. 'You surely know how many barbarous monsters now ravaging Italy the Herculean Poliziano has attacked, battered and destroyed. . . . He will at once pound to a pulp with his club and burn up in flames even the hundred heads of the Hydra which threaten my offspring.'³ Ficino then instructs Piero Soderini to rouse

¹ For the letter to Piero del Nero, Piero Guicciardini and Piero Soderini, dated 15 September 1489 and entitled 'Apologia quaedam, in qua de medicina, astrologia, vita mundi; item de Magis qui Christum statim natum salutaverunt', see Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed. and tr. by C. V. Kaske and J. R. Clark, Binghamton, NY, 1989, pp. 394–400. The treatise, which was completed in August 1489 and published on 3 December of that year, begins with a preface entitled: 'De cura valetudinis eorum qui incumbunt studio litterarum': p. 106. Translations from the Latin are my own, though I have consulted the version printed in this edition.

² *Ibid.*, p. 394: 'Alius ergo dicit: Nonne Marsilius est sacerdos? Est profecto. Quid igitur sacerdotibus cum medicina? Quid rursus cum astrologia commercii? Alius item: Quid Christiano cum magia vel imaginibus?'

³ *Ibid.*, p. 400: 'Tu vero, Guicciardine, carissime compater, ito nunc, ito alacer, Politianum Herculeum, accersito. . . . Nosti profecto quot barbara monstra Latium iam devastantia Politianus Hercules invaserit, laceraverit, interemerit. . . . Hic ergo

himself to action 'and greet the Apollonian Pico. . . . Inform my Apollo that the poisonous Python is just now rising up from the swamp against me. Implore him, please, to draw his bow; let him shoot his arrows immediately. I know what I am talking about: straightaway he will take aim and once and for all utterly destroy the poison in one fell swoop.'⁴

Ficino's monstrous premonitions proved to be correct, if a touch exaggerated: the treatise did cause him some difficulties with the Church in the following year;⁵ and Book III later appeared in the Index of Prohibited Books printed in Parma in 1580.⁶ There is no evidence, however, that his Hercules, the humanist Angelo Poliziano, or his Apollo, the philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, made any effort to slay the Hydras and Pythons menacing their friend. Both scholars, in fact, though on good terms with Ficino, were by no means uncritical admirers. In 1486 the twenty-three year-old Pico had written a *Commento* on a vernacular Platonic love poem, in which he made several sharp digs at the much older and more established Ficino, accusing him of failing to understand both Plato and the Platonic tradition.⁷ Friends of Pico and Ficino considered these gibes offensive enough to merit expurgation, and they are missing from all published versions of the text until Garin's edition of 1942.⁸ In

vel centum hydrae capita nostris liberis minitancia statim contundet clava, flammisque comburet.'

⁴ Ibid.: 'Eia, mi dulcissime Soderine, surge age, Picum salutato Phoebeum. . . . Nuntia Phoebo meo venenosum contra nos pythonem ex palude iamiam emergentem. Tendat arcum obsecra, precor; confestum spicula iaculetur. Intendet ille protinus, scio quid loquar, venenumque totum semel una nece necabit.'

⁵ Letters of Ficino from 1490 indicate that he was accused of some offence against religion, but the specific charges are not known; Ficino's bishop, Rainaldo Orsini, and the humanist Ermolao Barbaro seem to have made efforts to defend him: see the 'Introduction' to Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, p. 55.

⁶ See *Index de Rome 1590, 1593, 1596, avec étude des index de Parme 1580 et Munich 1582*, ed. by J. M. De Bujanda et al., Sherbrooke and Geneva, 1994, p. 154; it also appeared in the manuscript lists compiled in Turin around 1577 and in Naples in 1583: *ibid.*, p. 71.

⁷ The *Commento sopra una canzone de amore composta da Girolamo Benivieni* is published in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scripti vari*, ed. by E. Garin, Florence, 1942, pp. 443-581. For a typical criticism of Ficino see p. 466: 'mi maraviglio di Marsilio che tenga secondo Platone l'anima nostra essere immediatamente da Dio prodotta [*De amore*, IV.4]; il che non meno all setta di Proclo che a quella di Porfirio repugna'; see also p. 488: 'in ogni parte di questo trattato [Marsilio] abbia commesso in ogni materia errori'.

⁸ See S. Jayne's 'Introduction' to his translation of Pico's *Commentary on a Canzone of Benivieni*, New York etc., 1984, pp. 5-10.

addition, Pico announced in the *Commento* that he intended to write a full-scale commentary on Plato's *Symposium*,⁹ which, had he actually got round to writing it, would inevitably have challenged Ficino's authoritative interpretation of the dialogue. In 1491, two years after the publication of Ficino's *Three Books on Life*, Pico did manage to produce a brief treatise called *On Being and the One*, in which he rejected the Neoplatonic account of the *Parmenides* and *Sophist*—an account which was wholeheartedly accepted by Ficino.¹⁰ He responded in his commentary on the *Parmenides*, completed in 1494 but not published until 1496, two years after Pico's death. In chapter 49 Ficino took 'that marvellous (*mirandus*) young man' to task for failing to do his homework properly 'before being so cocksure as to assail his teacher and so headstrong as to publish a view that runs counter to that of all Platonists'.¹¹

While Ficino came to regard Pico as a brilliant but wayward pupil, Pico's great friend Poliziano—the two were much closer to each other than either was to Ficino—thought of the elder Platonist as a venerable but rather dull teacher. In the *Miscellanea* of 1489, he describes Ficino as an Orpheus who had successfully retrieved his Eurydice, that is, Platonic wisdom, from the underworld. But Poliziano then notes that as a young man, more interested in Homer than in Greek philosophy, he had nearly been put to sleep by the lectures of Ficino and his Aristotelian counterpart Johannes Argyropoulos. It was not until Pico returned to Florence in the late 1480s that Poliziano's interest in philosophy had been awakened.¹² And it is

⁹ See, e.g., Pico, *Commento*, pp. 530 and 556, where he says he will discuss matters more thoroughly 'nel commento nostro sopra el *Convivio* di Platone'.

¹⁰ *De ente et uno* is published in Pico, *De hominis dignitate*, pp. 385–441.

¹¹ Marsilio Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basel, 1576; repr. Turin, 1959 etc., p. 1164: 'Utinam mirandus ille iuvenis disputationes discussionesque superiores diligenter consideravisset antequam tam confidenter tangeret praeceptorem ac tam secure contra Platoniorum omnium sententiam divulgaret et divinum Parmenidem simpliciter esse logicum et Platonem una cum Aristotele ipsum cum ente unum et bonum adaequavisse.' See M. J. B. Allen, 'The Second Ficino-Pico Controversy: Parmenidean Poetry, Eristic, and the One', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Studi e documenti*, ed. by G. C. Garfagnini, 2 vols, Florence, 1986, II, pp. 417–55, esp. p. 431; and his *Icastes: Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's 'Sophist'*, Berkeley etc., 1989, pp. 11–48.

¹² See the 'Coronis' to his *Centuria prima miscellaneorum* in Angelo Poliziano, *Opera, quae quidem extitere hactenus, omnia*, Basel, 1553; repr. Turin, 1971, pp. 309–11, at p. 310: 'ego tenera adhuc aetate, sub duobus excellentissimis hominibus, Marsilio Ficino Florentino, cuius longe felicior quam Thracensis Orphei cithara veram (ni fallor) Euridicen, hoc est, amplissimi iudicii Platoniam sapientiam, revocavit ab

clear that from this time onwards he shared Pico's philosophical outlook, including his antipathy towards aspects of Neoplatonism dear to the heart of Ficino. Pico's treatise *On Being and the One* is dedicated to Poliziano, and he states that his humanist friend had already raised some of the same points when arguing against Lorenzo de' Medici, who here stands in for his unnamed former teacher, Ficino.¹³

That Poliziano was critical of Ficinian Neoplatonism is corroborated by his inaugural lecture for the academic year 1491/92, to which he gave the title *Lamia* or 'Bloodsucking Vampire'—Florence seems to have been overrun by monsters at this time. Poliziano pokes fun at Pythagoras, stating that his name is 'Ipse', 'He Himself', since that was what his disciples called him (a reference to their deferential habit of saying 'Ipse dixit'). Poliziano then warns his audience that they will 'dissolve into laughter' when they hear the ludicrous maxims of Pythagoras, such as 'Do not urinate on your nail and hair clippings but spit on them.'¹⁴ We might describe this tactic, rather coarsely but accurately, as taking the piss out of Pythagoras. But why does Poliziano do it? Ficino made no secret of his reverence for Pythagoras, whose seemingly absurd maxims, when properly interpreted by Neoplatonists such as Iamblichus, conveyed a profound significance; moreover, he considered Pythagoras to be one

inferis, et Argyropilo Byzantio Peripateticorum sui temporis longe clarissimo, dabam quidem philosophiae utriusque operam, sed non admodum assiduam, videlicet ad Homerii poetae blandimenta natura et aetate proclivior . . . donec reversus est in hanc urbem . . . Ioannes Picus Mirandula . . . is me instituit ad philosophiam, non ut antea somniculosus, sed vegetis vigilantibusque oculis explorandam . . .' For evidence of Poliziano's admiration for Ficino, see his epigram 'In Marsilium', *ibid.*, p. 594: 'Mores, ingenium, musas, sophiamque supremam | Vis uno dicam nomine? Marsilius', and his poem to Bartolomeo Fonzio in B. Fontius, *Carmina*, ed. by L. Juhász, Leipzig, 1932, pp. 24–28 (p. 27), discussed in I. Maïer, *Ange Politien. La formation d'un poète humaniste (1469–1480)*, Geneva, 1966, pp. 35–36.

¹³ See the 'Prooemium', addressed to Poliziano, in *De ente et uno*, pp. 386–88, at p. 386: 'Narrabas mihi superioribus diebus quae tecum de ente et uno Laurentius Medices egerat, cum adversus Aristotelem, cuius tu *Ethicam* hoc anno publice enarras, Platoniorum innixus rationibus disputaret. . . [R]ogabas quomodo et defenderetur in ea re Aristoteles et Platoni magistro consentiret. Dixi quae tunc mihi in mentem venerunt, confirmans potius quae tu Laurentio inter disputandum responderas, quam novum aliquid afferens.'

¹⁴ Angelo Poliziano, *Lamia. Praelectio in Priora Aristotelis Analytica*, ed. by A. Wesseling, Leiden, 1986, p. 4: 'Nomen illi erat Ipse: sic discipuli certe vocabant sui. . . Praecepta vero si Ipsius audieritis, risu, scio, diffluetis. . . Unguium criniumque tuorum prae-segmina ne commingito, sed in ea despuito.' Poliziano here conflates two maxims to comic effect: Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, VIII.17, and Iamblichus, *Protrepticus*, 21; see Wesseling's 'Commentary', p. 36, and his 'Introduction', pp. xvi–xvii.

of the virtuous pagans who, like Socrates and Plato, had worshipped the one God.¹⁵ It therefore seems likely that by attempting to knock Pythagoras off his pedestal, Poliziano was, in effect, mocking Ficino's exaggerated admiration for this predecessor of Plato.¹⁶

In August 1494, not long before the deaths of both Poliziano and Pico, and while the latter was working on his massive *Disputations against Divinatory Astrology*,¹⁷ Ficino wrote to Poliziano, praising the war which the two friends were waging against the astrologers. He described Poliziano once again as Hercules, and this time stated that Pico had been nurtured by Athena.¹⁸ Ficino went on to claim that, just as throughout his life he had been of one mind with Pico and Poliziano, so too in this enterprise he was in harmony with them.¹⁹ He then attempted, not very convincingly, to explain away his apparent endorsement of astrology in Book III of his treatise *On Life* and in other works of his.²⁰ Poliziano, in his reply, which is saturated with irony from beginning to end, said that he was delighted that Ficino was in agreement with Pico's views on astrology, adding that it did not matter whether or not Ficino had held the same position in the past, since it was no disgrace for a philosopher, who every day gains new knowledge, to change his opinion.²¹ Poliziano did,

¹⁵ See his letter of 26 January 1479 to Antonio Ivani, in Ficino, *Opera omnia*, p. 806, where he refers to 'Pythagoras et Socrates et Plato atque similes alii Dei unius cultores, optimisque moribus instituti'. See also C. Celenza, 'Pythagoras in the Renaissance: The Case of Marsilio Ficino', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 52 (1999), pp. 667-711.

¹⁶ For the reaction of some members of Ficino's circle to Poliziano's mocking treatment of the Pythagorean maxims see C. Vasoli, 'Pitagora in monastero', *Interpres*, 1 (1978), pp. 256-72, at p. 262.

¹⁷ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, ed. by E. Garin, 2 vols, Florence, 1946-52.

¹⁸ The letter is printed in Poliziano, *Opera omnia*, p. 134, where it is dated 21 August 1494, and in Ficino, *Opera omnia*, p. 958, dated there 20 August 1494 and with the title 'Quod sentiat de astrologia': 'Contra multos astrologos, qui more gigantum eripere coelum Iovi tam frustra quam impie moliantur, merito et Pico alumnus Palladis et tu miles Hercules saepe feliciterque certatis.'

¹⁹ *Ibid.*: 'Ego autem quid? Profecto tanquam in omni vita vobis unanimes, in hoc quoque studio conspiro vobiscum.'

²⁰ See A. Grafton, *Commerce with the Classics: Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers*, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1997, pp. 122-23.

²¹ Poliziano, *Opera omnia*, p. 135: 'quod ad astrologos attinet, de quibus epistolam mihi pulcherrimam scripsisti, laetor summopere, quod a Pico nostro tu quoque vel nunc primum stes, vel olim iam steteris. Nec enim referre arbitror, utrum tibi aliud alias visum sit, an ex aliorum potius opinione aliquando scripseris. Nam nec mutare sententiam turpe philosopho, qui cottidie plus videt...' See also E. Garin,

however, ask Ficino to kindly stop referring to him as Hercules, since he feared it would make him into a laughing-stock.²²

Poliziano and Pico were clearly not the heroic and godlike defenders that Ficino, perhaps somewhat naïvely, had hoped they would be. Instead, they behaved towards him as friendly but nonetheless trenchant critics. In the century after his death, Ficino continued to be in the firing line from time to time, though his attackers were few in number compared to the many who sang his praises and imbibed his ideas, whether directly or indirectly. Still, if we wish to assess Ficino's later influence, we need to pay attention not only to his manifest strengths but also to his areas of weakness and vulnerability, as perceived by the generations which followed him. I shall therefore look at a handful of sixteenth-century thinkers who found fault with Ficino's account of Platonic love, with his abilities as a translator of and commentator on Plato and with his attempts to reconcile Platonism and Christianity.

The interpretation of Platonic love which Ficino presented in his commentary on the *Symposium* was one of his most influential doctrines, making a particular impact on Italian literature of the sixteenth century, from Pietro Bembo's *Asolani* of 1505, via Baldassare Castiglione's *Cortegiano* of 1528, to Giordano Bruno's *Eroici furori* of 1585. These authors, of course, modified the theory to suit the taste of their readers, transforming, for instance, the homoerotic desire celebrated by Plato and Ficino into the more acceptable heterosexual passion familiar from courtly love and Petrarchan poetry.²³ Nevertheless, in the vernacular tradition—and this includes the French and English, as well as the Italian—the main lines set out by Ficino remained intact. Some of the basic assumptions on which his theory rested were, however, challenged in a Latin treatise made up of two books, one on love, the other on beauty, completed in 1529 and published in 1531. The author was Agostino Nifo, a leading Aristotelian philosopher, as well as a practising physician, from south-

'L'ambiente del Poliziano', in his *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano: ricerche e documenti*, Florence, 1994, pp. 335–58, at pp. 344–45.

²² Poliziano, *Opera omnia*, p. 135: 'Illud vero nescio satisne probem, quod Herculem vocare me pergis. Tu quidem opinor iocaris. Sed tamen ansam timeo ne praebeas cavillandi ridendique malevolis et invidis, quibus nemo unquam vir bonus ac doctus caruit.'

²³ J. Kraye, 'The Transformation of Platonic Love in the Italian Renaissance', in *Platonism and the English Imagination*, ed. by A. Baldwin and S. Hutton, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 76–85.

ern Italy, who in a long career taught at the universities of Padua, Naples, Salerno, Rome and Pisa, and who published numerous commentaries on Aristotle's logic, natural philosophy and metaphysics.²⁴ Nifo was thoroughly acquainted with Ficino's works, frequently quoting from his Platonic translations and commentaries, and from his Latin version of and commentary on Plotinus. More importantly, Ficino's arguments for the immortality of the soul, above all in his *Platonic Theology*, greatly influenced Nifo's views on this subject.²⁵

Yet, while Nifo regarded Ficino as an authority on the soul, he was not willing to follow him when it came to the body. Indeed, one of the main differences between Ficino's account of Platonic love and the Peripatetic theory which Nifo set up to rival it was the role assigned to the body and, in particular, to the senses. In his *Symposium* commentary Ficino had maintained that the desire to enjoy beauty, which was the essence of love, could only be satisfied by means of the mind, the eyes and the ears, and not by the more corporeal senses of smell, taste and touch.²⁶ Pico had gone even further in his *Commento*, restricting the perception of beauty, and hence love, to sight alone.²⁷ It is Ficino's version, here and elsewhere in the treatise, that Nifo explicitly takes issue with, arguing that beauty can be enjoyed by all five senses, since each of them is capable of transmitting the sensible species of beauty to the soul.²⁸ To demonstrate that taste and touch contribute to beauty, Nifo quotes a passage

²⁴ E. P. Mahoney, 'Nifo, Agostino (c. 1470–1538)', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by E. Craig, 10 vols, London and New York, 1998, VI, pp. 867–72.

²⁵ E. P. Mahoney, 'Marsilio Ficino's Influence on Nicoletto Vernia, Agostino Nifo and Marcantonio Zimara', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, II, pp. 509–31, at pp. 517–24.

²⁶ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, ed. and tr. by R. Marcel, Paris, 1956, p. 142 (I.4): 'Cum . . . mens, visus, auditus sint, quibus solis frui pulchritudine possumus, amor vero sit fruende pulchritudinis desiderium, amor semper mente, oculis, auribus est contentus. Quid olfactu? Quid gustu vel tactu opus est? Odores, sapes, calorem, frigus, mollitiem et durtiorem horumque similia sensus isti percipiunt. Istorum nullum humana pulchritudo est . . .'

²⁷ Pico, *Commento*, p. 497: 'da una sola potenza cognoscitiva nasce amore, cioè, dal viso'.

²⁸ Agostino Nifo, *Libri duo. De pulchro primus. De amore secundus*, Lyons, 1549, p. 102: 'per quot sensus pulchri species ad imaginariam animam fertur, per tot amor, desiderium fruendae pulchritudinis, esse debet. Sed per omnes sensus pulchri species ad imaginariam ipsam animam defertur.' On this treatise see S. Ebbesmeyer, 'Sinnlichkeit und Vernunft: Studien zur Rezeption und Transformation der Liebestheorien Platons in der Renaissance', PhD dissertation, Universität Hildesheim, 1998, pp. 174–84.

from the *Metamorphoses*, in which Ovid describes the beautiful nymph Galatea, saying that she is 'sweeter than ripened grapes, softer than swan's down and curds'.²⁹ According to Nifo, moreover, experience teaches that sometimes the sense of touch on its own can transmit beauty to the soul. For young women who are completely ugly and repellent are able to arouse ardent passion in some men because they are exceedingly soft, supple and smooth to the touch.³⁰ And who, Nifo asks, would consider a woman beautiful if her skin was hard, rough and offensive? Women themselves prove this point, for they would not cleanse and soften their skin by taking baths unless they believed that this would make them seem more beautiful.³¹ The same arguments apply to smell. No one would regard a woman as at all beautiful if her flesh and breath were foul-smelling. Nor would women smear themselves with perfumes and fragrant ointments if they did not think that this would add to their beauty.³² The sense of taste, too, plays its part; for in kissing we taste a certain sweetness in our lips, tongue and mouth by means of which beauty is also perceived.³³

Nifo thus gives parity with vision and hearing to the lower senses of taste, touch and smell, which Ficino had sought to banish from any consideration of love or beauty. He also makes a great show of basing his arguments not only on an Aristotelian account of sense perception but also on his observations of how people actually behave. By contrast, according to Nifo, what the Platonists say about beauty is highly wrought and well written, but much of it seems more rhetorical than true.³⁴ Throughout the treatise, Nifo's discussion of love

²⁹ Nifo, *Libri duo*, p. 102, quoting Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XIII.789-97, at lines 795-96: 'matura dulcior uva | mollior et cygne plumis et lacta coacta'.

³⁰ Nifo, *Libri duo*, p. 103: 'Experientia etiam docet, quod aliquando per solum tactum deferatur pulchri species ad animam. Nam puellae in omnibus deformes ac turpes, quia tamen in tactus lenitate, mollitie ac suavitate existimantur excellere, ad amorem ardentem nonnunquam homines rapiunt.'

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43: 'Quis enim puellam pulchram dicet, si eius carnes fuerint durae, si asperae, si insuaves? . . . [P]uellae etiam ipsae nobis argumento sunt, quae lavacris carnes abstergunt, leniunt atque lavant, quae . . . non facerent, nisi per haec se pulchriores videri opinarentur.'

³² *Ibid.*: 'quis puellam omnino pulchram existimabit, si eius caro atque os foetida fuerint? . . . [P]uellae ipsae nobis argumento sunt, quae ut pulchriores reddantur, odoribus, unguentis, rebusque odoriferis se illinunt, quae non facerent, nisi per haec se pulchriores fieri arbitrentur.'

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 44: 'per basia in labiis, lingua atque ore dulcedinem quandam degustamus; etiam per gustum species pulchri deferitur'.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25: 'Et licet quae de pulchro Platonici tradunt, satis ornate atque compositae dixerint, multa tamen eorum potius rhetorica quam vera videntur.'

has a realism, even earthiness, which constantly subverts Ficino's highly idealized Platonic doctrine. Nifo points out, for instance, that love cannot always be defined as a desire to generate beauty in beauty, as Plato's Diotima had claimed,³⁵ since lovers very often procure abortions.³⁶

The fundamental distinction between the approaches of Ficino and Nifo can be seen most tellingly in the latter's assertion that there can be no human love without sexual desire and carnal lust. Ficino, he says, believes that this can happen in the two highest types of lover, the contemplative man and the moral or active man.³⁷ Nifo, however, anticipating Freud by four centuries, maintains that a father cannot enjoy the beauty of his daughters, nor can heroic and saintly men or philosophers enjoy the beauty of young women and men without sexual desire being aroused.³⁸ And if this is true even when beauty is enjoyed only through vision and hearing, how much more is it so if the corporeal senses are also involved, so that the enjoyment is enhanced through taste by kissing, through smell by odour and through touch by softness?³⁹ So, for Nifo, a father cannot enjoy his beautiful daughters, nor a saint beautiful young women, without sex coming into the picture, unless perhaps, he concedes, this happens by means of a divine miracle.⁴⁰

Another part of Ficino's work which, like his Platonic love theory, enjoyed notable success in the sixteenth century was his Latin translation of Plato's dialogues. When published in 1484, it made

³⁵ Plato, *Symposium*, 206E; see Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet*, pp. 223–25 (VI.11).

³⁶ Nifo, *Libri duo*, p. 156: 'amans non semper desiderat generare pulchrum in pulchro . . . ; imo persaepe amantes procurant abortum'.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105: 'Nemo . . . frui posse videtur ipsa humana pulchritudine per omnes aut aliquos humanos sensus, qui eiusdem utendae desiderio non afficiatur. Quare nec amor fruendi pulchri humani esse poterit absque desiderio veneris cupiditineque amore. Ficinus id fieri posse in contemplativis hominibus, quinetiam in moralibus aperte fatetur, qui vel ex humano amore ascendunt ad mentem, vel in morali ipso amore persistent.' For Ficino's tripartite division of lovers into contemplative, active and voluptuous, see his *Commentaire sur le Banquet*, pp. 211–12 (VI.8).

³⁸ Nifo, *Libri duo*, p. 106: 'non arbitror fieri posse ut pater pulchritudine in filiis aut viri heroici sanctique aut philosophi in puellis puerisque fruatur sine veneris appetitu'.

³⁹ *Ibid.*: 'impossibile videtur, ut quis in puellis puerisque pulchritudine fruatur [per visum atque auditum] sine veneris appetitu. Quanto minus id fieri poterit, si per corporeos ipsos sensus fruitio fiat, ut per gustum, qui basii, per olfactum, qui odore, per tactum, qui lenitate perficitur?'

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 108: 'nec pater filiis pulchris, nec sanctus puellis frui poterit sine veneris desiderio, nisi fortasse divino miraculo id fieret'.

the complete Platonic corpus available to western readers for the first time; and in the following century, there were some thirty editions.⁴¹ Ficino's version did not, of course, please everyone—an impossible task, as those of us who have done translations are all too well aware. One critic was the Spanish philosopher Sebastián Fox-Morcillo, whose commentaries on the *Timaeus*, *Phaedo* and *Republic* were based on Ficino's translations and published along with them in the mid-1550s. He stated in the preface to the *Republic* that Plato had not been skilfully or properly translated by Ficino. Nonetheless, he did not want to produce his own version from the Greek, since this would be an onerous and lengthy chore which would bring little or no benefit.⁴² Given his negative judgement on Ficino's abilities, it comes as a surprise that Fox-Morcillo in his commentaries makes no corrections to Ficino's translation of the *Republic*, and points out only two mistakes in the *Timaeus* and one in the *Phaedo*, all three errors relating to minor points of biological or medical terminology.⁴³ In the preface to the *Timaeus*, Fox-Morcillo claims to be the first Latin author since Chalcidius who dared to write a commentary on this extremely difficult dialogue.⁴⁴ He seems genuinely unaware that Ficino had been there before him, publishing a lengthy introduction and commentary along with his translation of the *Timaeus* in the

⁴¹ J. Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Leiden etc., 1990, pp. 479–81.

⁴² Sebastián Fox-Morcillo, *Commentatio in decem Platonis libros De republica*, Basel, 1556, sig. a5r: 'hoc ichor serum sanguinis hic significat, non pus, ut Marsilio videtur'; and de Graeco Latinum facere voluimus, quoniam in eo gravis, diuturnusque labor subeundus, utilitas autem nulla, aut exigua esset'.

⁴³ See Sebastián Fox-Morcillo, *In Platonis Timaeum commentarii*, Basel, 1554, col. 453, where he says of Ficino's translation of 85C, 'Tunc autem pessima est, quando pus sanguini mixta': 'hoc ichor serum sanguinis hic significat, non pus, ut Marsilio videtur'; and col. 454: 'hic advertite, non recte a Marsilio transferri ἀμφημερινός [86A] quotidianam discretam. Nam simpliciter quotidiana deberet.' See also his *In Platonis dialogum, qui Phaedo, seu de animorum immortalitate inscribitur*, Basel, 1556, col. 106: 'castigabo locum [96B] a Marsilio Ficino non bene versum'.

⁴⁴ Fox-Morcillo, *In Platonis Timaeum commentarii*, sig. a2v: 'nemo Latinorum adhuc, excepto Chalcidio, qui pauca in priorem libri huius partem scripsit, provinciam hanc Timaei explicandi suscepit'; sig. a3r: 'si quid ego vel minus recte, vel minus apte in hac Platonis interpretatione dixero, id quod viam aperienti facile est, danda nobis erit venia, cum summa rei difficultas excusare nostrum errorem possit. Nam res quidem difficiles sine alterius exemplo velle aggredi, quamvis non ita ex voto succedat, atque si aliorum sequutus sis vestigia; tamen, ut Poeta inquit [Propertius, *Elegies*, II.10.6] "Laus erit in magnis, et voluisse sat est": praesertim cum hanc nos Timaei interpretationem exacte absolvere, quod nemo adhuc Latinorum tentavit, ausi fuerimus.'

1484 edition of Plato's works, and a revised and expanded version in 1496.⁴⁵ Nor does Fox-Morcillo here mention, or show any knowledge of, Ficino's other commentaries. Nevertheless, his complaints about the tedious prolixity of Proclus's commentaries and his own preference for brief annotations that deal with specific problems of interpretation indicate that he would probably not have appreciated those of Ficino had he known them.⁴⁶

Ficino's commentaries and *argumenta* were included in the 1561 Basel edition of the Latin translation of Plato's works by the German physician and professor of medicine, Johann Haynpul, or Janus Cornarius—one of the two complete sixteenth-century Latin versions that rivalled but by no means replaced Ficino's.⁴⁷ It is taken for granted in this edition that the reader will not want to miss out on anything which the 'outstanding philosopher' Marsilio Ficino had written on Plato with 'resourceful diligence' and 'much careful preparation'.⁴⁸ Ficino's other competitor, the Huguenot theologian and historian, Jean de Serres, or Johannes Serranus, was not so generous towards his rivals. Serranus's Latin version of the dialogues appeared in the famous Greek-Latin edition published by Henri Estienne in 1578, whose pagination we still use today when citing Plato. In the preface, Serranus says that it did not seem a good idea to criticize the versions of Ficino and Cornarius, nor did he approve of this passion for finding faults. They had done what was in their power to do at the time they did it and should be praised for their efforts. And he had done what he could. The whole matter should be left to the judgement of learned men, who should compare the three

⁴⁵ M. J. B. Allen, 'Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* and its Myth of the Demiurge', in *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. by J. Hankins, J. Monfasani and F. Purnell, Jr., Binghamton, NY, 1987, pp. 399–439, at p. 402. Various medieval commentaries are also ignored.

⁴⁶ Fox-Morcillo, *In Platonis Timaeum commentarii*, sig. a2v: 'si quae sunt Graecorum interpretum scripta in eundem librum, nulla profecto inter nos extant, praeter unius Procli commentarios, eosdemque nimis prolixos . . . [I]n Platonis sententia declaranda fuit admodum diffusus, adeo ut lectori moveat fastidium'; sig. a3^r: 'prolixae illae Procli commentationes lectorem taedio afficerent'.

⁴⁷ See J. Hankins, 'Some Remarks on the History and Character of Ficino's Latin Translation of Plato', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, I, pp. 287–304, at pp. 288 and 291.

⁴⁸ Plato, *Opera quae ad nos extant omnia*, tr. by Janus Cornarius, Basel, 1561, sig. ZZ5r: 'Ne quid eorum quae eximius philosophus Marsilius Ficinus in Platonis opera solerti industria meditatus est et multa commentatione exaravit, lector benevolus desideret, requirativae, ipsius hic in calce operis subiecimus praefationem.'

versions.⁴⁹ While not exactly an attack on Ficino's skills as a translator, this falls some way short of a ringing endorsement. Estienne seems more complimentary, though in a backhanded way. Describing his establishment of the Greek text, he says that when he found manuscript readings that differed from those in previous printed editions, he put the variants in the margins if he felt that the vulgate could stand. He only altered the text itself in those places—some of which, he says, not even Ficino noticed—where it was completely unsound.⁵⁰ This effort to one-up Ficino nevertheless makes it clear that Estienne regarded him as the man to beat.

When Serranus explains his method of commenting on Plato, he stresses that it was not his intention to write lengthy expositions; he aimed rather to present the material as simply, clearly and briefly as he could.⁵¹ Once again he turns to learned men, asking them to judge whether this technique sheds light on Plato's meaning. He frankly admits that he disapproves of those commentators who pervert Plato's straightforward meaning by allegorical readings and envelop everything in malapropos fictions. These expositors omit essentials, while bringing together cartloads of unsuitable disquisitions that give no indication of the setting or structure and are of no use to learning.⁵² Serranus does not name names. Like Fox-Morcillo, he may have had ancient Neoplatonists such as Proclus in

⁴⁹ Plato, *Opera quae extant omnia*, ed. and tr. by Johannes Serranus, 3 vols, Paris, 1578, I, sig. ***1v: 'Non placuit in Marsilii Ficini vel Iani Cornarii interpretationes animadvertere, neque mihi unquam in quoquam potuit probari haec φιλοκατηγορία. Illi et pro tempore praestiterunt quod fuit in ipsorum potestate, et laudandus est ipsorum conatus; ego item quod potui praestiti; ex collatione de re tota eruditi iudicanto, quorum arbitriis mea lubenter submitto.'

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, sig. *4r: 'Ac quum varia ex veteribus libris auxilia conquisivissem, hanc in eorum usu cautionem adhibui, ut quae lectiones praecedentium editionum . . . ferri posse viderentur, in ista etiam retinerentur, diversis margini adscriptis; in earum autem locum quae οὐδὲν ὑγιᾶς haberent (quarum etiam nonnullae ne a Ficino quidem agnoscuntur) diversae illae ex vetustis petitae libris substituerentur.'

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, sig. ***2r: 'Non fuit . . . meum consilium longos commentarios congerere. . . . Exposui simpliciter et perspicue, quantum potui, sententiam Platonicorum dogmatum. . . . Qua quidem notatione, quantum et brevissime et simplicissime potui, perfunctus sum.'

⁵² *Ibid.*: 'An haec interpretandi ratio lucem sit allatura Platonicae doctrinae, iudicabunt eruditi et ipsa res docebit. Hoc tamen ingenue dicam, me non posse probare commentationes vulgarium interpretum, qui simplicem Platonis doctrinam allegoriis pervertunt, et ἀπροσδιόνυσοις commentis omnia involvunt . . . ; omittuntur οὐσιώδη convectantur plaustra importunarum disquisitionum, nulla nec θέσεως nec οἰκονομίας indicatione, nullo doctrinae usu.'

mind.⁵³ Even so, it seems probable that, as with his translation, Serranus is asking for his commentaries to be compared to those of his contemporaries, among whom Ficino, so powerfully influenced by Neoplatonic hermeneutics, seems to fit the bill most closely.

Ficino's allegorical interpretations of Plato were explicitly criticized by another Protestant scholar, Étienne Tremblay, a philosophy professor at the Genevan Academy. Tremblay complained in his 1592 edition of Ficino's Latin Plato that the translator's style was not sufficient to convey his author's eloquence, but nevertheless maintained that Ficino's understanding of Plato was so profound that one was almost tempted to believe that the philosopher's soul had transmigrated into his commentator's body.⁵⁴ Therefore, when the publisher asked him to cut down Ficino's lengthy *argumenta*—publishers have not changed much in the last four hundred years—Tremblay for a long time doubted whether this could easily be done. Finally, however, he realized that without detriment to Ficino or causing any problem for the reader, he could eliminate from the commentaries those passages which were allegorical and remote from Plato's way of thinking, especially those in which the sacred mysteries of Christianity were mixed together with the fantasies and delusions, not of Plato, who never even dreamed of such things, but of his Neoplatonic interpreters.⁵⁵ As an example, he cites Ficino's comments on Book VI of the *Republic*, in which he appears to identify Plato's 'offspring of the Good' with Jesus Christ.⁵⁶

In the 1590s it was not only Protestants like Tremblay who reproached Ficino for blending Platonism with Christianity. Some Catholics in the Post-Tridentine era also thought he had gone too

⁵³ See E. N. Tigerstedt, *The Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic Interpretation of Plato*, Helsinki, 1974, pp. 39–41.

⁵⁴ Hankins, *Plato*, pp. 481–82; for the text of the preface see pp. 657–65.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 663.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 663–64; for Ficino's comments on *Republic* 508c see his *Opera omnia*, pp. 1406–08. Pico, in his *Commento*, pp. 466–67, had warned that references to the 'son of God' and other suggestive phrases found in the writings of the Platonists and of ancient philosophers such as Hermes Trismegistus and Zoroaster should not be understood as referring to the second person of the Christian Trinity; yet, despite his generally captious attitude towards Ficino in this work, Pico does not accuse him of having committed this error. See M. J. B. Allen, 'Marsilio Ficino on Plato, the Neoplatonists and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 37 (1984), pp. 555–84, who shows that while Ficino believed that Plato, like Moses and the Old Testament prophets, had anticipated some of the truths of Christian revelation, he had not fully understood them.

far in this direction. Among these was Paolo Beni, a former Jesuit who had been dismissed from the order on account of his unseemly quarrels with his brothers over their father's legacy.⁵⁷ During his Jesuit phase, he had written a learned commentary on the *Timaeus*, the first decade of which was published in 1594 in Rome, where Beni, no longer a Jesuit but still a priest, was lecturing on Aristotelian natural philosophy at the Sapienza. He got the post after it was turned down by Giovan Battista Crispo,⁵⁸ who also had strong views on Ficino, as we shall see later. In Rome Beni was a colleague of the Platonist Francesco Patrizi, at the time engaged in an unsuccessful struggle to prevent the Inquisition from placing his controversial treatise *Nova de universis philosophia* on the Index of Prohibited Books.⁵⁹ Like Patrizi, Beni was connected with the circle of Piero and Cinzio Aldobrandini, the cardinal *nipoti* of Pope Clement VIII.⁶⁰ And despite significant differences in their approaches to philosophy—Patrizi was wholly hostile to the Peripatetic tradition, whereas Beni was interested in reconciling Platonism with Aristotelianism—Patrizi described Beni's work as a 'large and splendid commentary on the *Timaeus*, which adapts the entire philosophy of Plato to the service of the Holy Roman Church'.⁶¹ Although it was not until 1624, the year before his death, that Beni finally published part of the second decade of his *Timaeus* commentary, under the title *The*

⁵⁷ On Beni's life see P. B. Diffley, *Paolo Beni: A Biographical and Critical Study*, Oxford, 1988, which corrects many of the errors in G. Mazzacurati's article on Beni in the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, VIII (1966), pp. 494–501. I would like to thank Paul Diffley for generously sending me his notes on Beni's Platonic writings.

⁵⁸ M. Muccillo, 'Il platonismo all'Università di Roma: Francesco Patrizi', in *Roma e lo Studium Urbis: spazio urbano e cultura dal Quattro al Seicento, Atti del convegno, Roma, 7–10 giugno 1989*, ed. by P. Cherubini, Rome, 1992, pp. 200–47, at pp. 224–29.

⁵⁹ T. Gregory, 'L'"Apologia" e le "Declarationes" di F. Patrizi', in *Medioevo e Rinascimento: Studi in onore di Bruno Nardi*, 2 vols, Florence, 1955, I, pp. 385–424.

⁶⁰ It is stated on the title-page of Beni's *In Platonis Timaeum, sive in naturalem omnem atque divinam Platonis et Aristotelis philosophiam decades tres, ex quibus tres priores libri . . . seorsim quoque editi*, Rome, 1594, that the work is dedicated to 'Clementi IIX. Pont. Max. tanquam religionis morumque propugnatori ac restitutori acerrimo; tum vero Cynthio Aldobrandini S. R. E. Cardinali amplissimo, quippe Clementis Nepoti ac bonarum artium tutiori splendidissimo'.

⁶¹ See the letter quoted by Gregory, 'L'"Apologia" e le "Declarationes" di F. Patrizi', p. 389, n. 9, in which Patrizi says of Beni: 'ora fa stampare un grande nobilissimo comento sopra il Timeo di Platone, riducendo tutta la filosofia di Platone al servizio di Santa Romana Ecclesia'.

Theology of Plato and Aristotle,⁶² it had been completed by 1594.⁶³ The commentary should therefore be seen as a document of the efforts of a Jesuit in the 1580s and early 1590s to interpret pagan philosophy within the increasingly narrow limits of Counter-Reformation orthodoxy.

In the first decade of the commentary, Beni makes various derogatory remarks about Ficino's interpretation of the *Timaeus*. He observes, for example, that when Ficino discusses nature, he simply adopts the views of Plotinus and Proclus, explicating and enlarging on these rather than producing anything of his own, and at times merely repeating their words verbatim like a translator.⁶⁴ In addition to slavish dependence on his Neoplatonic sources, this also shows bad judgement on Ficino's part, because, in Beni's reading of the dialogue, Proclus's definition of nature, which Ficino uncritically accepts, is 'either unsound or entirely foreign to Plato's thinking'.⁶⁵ Beni further accuses Ficino of coming up with expositions which, though ingenious, are not solidly backed up by chapter and verse references to Plato's writings. 'It is a fine thing', says Beni, 'to put forward many acute and apposite ideas; but it is finer still to confirm them by the power and weight of reasoning.'⁶⁶

Near the end of the first decade, Beni examines the theory that Plato had studied Mosaic wisdom, which was expounded by Ficino in a letter entitled 'The Concord of Moses and Plato' with evidence

⁶² Paolo Beni, *Platonis et Aristotelis theologia*, Padua, 1624.

⁶³ The third decade and the remaining part of the second survive in manuscript in the Archivio Segreto Vaticano; see Diffley, *Beni*, p. 43.

⁶⁴ Beni, *In Platonis Timaeum*, p. 321: 'Marsilius . . . quoties fere in sermonem de natura incidit, ita Plotini [*Enneads*, II.8.1-4] ac Procli decretis [*In Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, ed. by E. Diehl, 3 vols, Leipzig, 1903-06, p. 9, line 25-p. 14, line 3] addictus est, ut ea explicare potius ac dilatare videatur, quam aliquid ex sui officina proferre'; Beni then quotes the definition of nature given by Ficino in chapters 1 and 26 of his *argumentum* to the *Timaeus*, in *Opera omnia*, pp. 1438 and 1449-50, and states: 'Procli opinionem quasi interpres ad verbum expressit'.

⁶⁵ Beni, *In Platonis Timaeum*, p. 220: 'si consilium accurate exquiramus, quo noster Plato naturae nomine in dialogo inscribendo usus sit, Procli opinionem aut infirmam aut a Platonis mente omnino alienam existimare debeamus'.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 599, summarizes chapter 7 of Ficino's *argumentum*, in *Opera omnia*, pp. 1440-41, which concerns *Timaeus*, 27D-28A; Beni then writes: 'Qui sane licet mihi videri solet longe ingeniosius hac in re philosophari atque distinctius quam caeteri Platonici, veruntamen quoniam in re adeo nobili ac perdifficili versamur, quaeque ad universitatis initia investiganda ac statuenda usurpantur a Platone, optassem ut ipsiusmet Platonis, cui hanc sententiam tribuit, locis ac dictis proposita dogmata confirmasset. Praeclarum est enim apposite multa atque acute proferre, sed ea rationum vi ac pondere confirmare, praeclarior.'

taken from the *Timaeus*, among other sources.⁶⁷ Beni firmly rejects this theory, arguing that the doctrines found in the *Timaeus* were gathered together by Plato from a variety of sources—above all, the Pythagorean Timaeus of Locri, but also Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Hesiod, Heraclitus and Zoroaster.⁶⁸ As for Moses's description of creation in Genesis, after carefully comparing it with the *Timaeus*, Beni observed that there were some points of agreement, but many others where there were considerable discrepancies between the two accounts. He says, moreover, that while he found nothing in Plato's dialogue that he felt could have come only from Moses, he encountered a number of items which led him to believe that Plato had never read Genesis. He therefore entirely disagreed with those who, like Ficino, thought that Plato was familiar with the content of the Mosaic books.⁶⁹

In the second decade of his commentary, which focuses on Plato's theology, Beni once again upbraids Ficino for coming up with flimsy, unsubstantiated interpretations, in particular about the origins of the world:

apart from the fact that he proves nothing by means of arguments but instead puts forward everything according to his own judgement, much of it, rather than appearing plausible, seems to have been disclosed

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 664: 'Marsilius Ficinus cum enim multa ex Platone collegisset, quae cum sacra Moysis historia omnino consentire viderentur . . . Mosaycae . . . legis [Platonem] studiosum efficere contendebat.' See 'Concordia Mosis et Platonis. Marsilius Ficinus Braccio Marcello . . . S. D.', *Epistolarum liber VIII*, in Ficino, *Opera omnia*, pp. 866–67.

⁶⁸ Beni, *In Platonis Timaeum*, p. 669: 'Ego vero in eam sententiam deveni, ut existimem Platonem ex variis sapientum decretis, quae de rerum universitate extarent, iis excerptis, quae sibi nobiliora ac potiora viderentur, ea ad Timaeum non secus retulisse quam apes efficere soleant, dum . . . per prata volitantes, varios flores seligunt ac delibant, ex iisque mel conficiunt. . . Sed qui tandem (inquires) sunt ii quorum decretis Platonis Timaeus addictus fuit? Pythagoreum Locrum prae caeteris sequutus est; praeterea vero Trismegistum Mercurium, Orphei quoque, Hesiodi, Heracliti, Zoroastri et magorum sententias atque oracula quandoque sectatus est.' See also A. Rotondò, 'Cultura umanistica e difficoltà di censori. Censura ecclesiastica e discussioni cinquecentesche sul Platonismo', in *Le Pouvoir et la plume: Incitation, contrôle et répression dans l'Italie du XVI^e siècle, Actes du Colloque international . . . Marseille, 14–16 mai 1981*, Paris, 1982, pp. 15–50, at pp. 41–45.

⁶⁹ Beni, *In Platonis Timaeum*, pp. 678–79: 'Equidem cum Moysis Genesis cum Platonis Timaeo contulerim diligenter, animadverti sane illos cum in aliquibus facile inter se convenire, tum in multis etiam quam longissime discrepare. . . Immo (ut ingenue fatear) nihil unquam inveni apud Platonem quod deprehendere potuerim ex una Moysis historia fuisse expressum; in multa vero incidi, ob quae existimem eam legisse nunquam; ut propterea iis qui asserunt Moysis libros Platoni fuisse familiares . . . assentiri nullo modo possim.'

while he was out of his senses and dreaming. Since this is not a trivial matter, but concerns the beginnings of the world, I should have greatly preferred him to have separated out truth from falsehood in Plato's doctrines, fulfilling the duty of a Christian philosopher, rather than, like a rhapsodist and with no discrimination at all, mixing together such a variety of things, and at times muddling them arbitrarily with our holy decrees. This must not be done except in a level-headed manner and with great caution, and in such a way that the pagan doctrines are censured.⁷⁰

He is even more caustic about Ficino when it comes to the issue of whether Plato believed the universe to be eternal. Even though virtually all ancient Platonists maintained that according to Plato the universe had existed from eternity,⁷¹ Beni disagreed, claiming that this false interpretation had been promoted by the militant pagans Porphyry, Proclus and Simplicius as part of their campaign against Christianity.⁷² It was therefore dismaying that Christians such as Cardinal Bessarion and Ficino had been taken in by it.⁷³ Indeed, Ficino, above all in his commentary on the *Enneads*, had thrown caution to the winds and commented on the arguments of Porphyry and Proclus as if he agreed with them. Ficino, Beni concluded, had 'treated this very serious matter with such licence that, although in other respects he was pious and, as the rest of his writings indicate, had an excellent attitude towards divine letters, you would nevertheless think that he was not a Christian but a pagan and that he philosophized in a pagan manner.'⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Beni, *Theologia*, pp. 143–44: 'praeterquam quod nihil confirmat argumentis, sed pro arbitratu profert omnia, pleraque videri possunt ἑκστατικῶς enunciata ac somniis quam vero similia. Denique quoniam non in re levi, sed in mundi initiis versabatur, magnopere optassem ut pro Christiani philosophi munere vera a falsis secrevisset potius in Platonis dogmatibus, quam rapsodi instar ac sine delectu tam varia permiscuisset, et cum sacrosanctis decretis nostris pro libidine interdum coniunxisset. Id enim nonnisi sobrie ac magna cautione fieri debuit, et ut profana dogmata castigentur.'

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 113–14: 'Iamblichus, Porphyrius, Plotinus, Proclus, Macrobius, Simplicius, Alcinous, Chalcidius et Apuleius, Platonici sane praecipui et nobiles omnino voluerunt mundum ex Platonis sententia fuisse ab omni aeternitate.'

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 115: 'moliti sunt Porphyrius, Proclus atque Simplicius, quod ut erant Christiani nominis hostes, Ammonium, Philoponum aliosque nostrarum partium fautores refellere'.

⁷³ See *ibid.*, p. 118, where Beni says of Cardinal Bessarion: 'haud tamen dubitavit cum perfidissimis philosophis inire foedus, ac Platonem facere aeternitatis opinatorem'; see Bessarion, *In calumniatorem Platonis libri IV*, in L. Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsmann*, 3 vols, Paderborn, 1923–42, II, p. 109 (II.5).

⁷⁴ Beni, *Theologia*, pp. 118–19: 'cum alibi saepe, cum maxime in Plotini librum

Beni's main objections to Ficino, then, were that he was soft on paganism and that he promiscuously blended together Christian and pagan sources. Similar accusations were made by Giovan Battista Crispo, a little-known scholar from Gallipoli in southern Italy whose interests ranged from poetry to cartography.⁷⁵ Crispo made these charges in a treatise published in 1594, the same year as Beni's *Timaeus* commentary, and entitled *On the Need for Caution When Reading Pagan Philosophers*.⁷⁶ The book, in fact, covered only Plato; but it was intended as the first in a series of volumes which would eventually include virtually all non-Christian thinkers, from Alexander of Aphrodisias to Zoroaster.⁷⁷ It was no accident that Crispo chose to begin with Plato, whose philosophy he regarded as the greatest threat to Christianity and the source of most, if not all, heresies, including Protestantism.⁷⁸ It was probably Crispo's rabid anti-Platonism that led the authorities to offer him the philosophy post at the University of Rome before giving it to the more moderate Beni.⁷⁹ The tide in Rome was beginning to turn against Plato, who was rapidly acquiring enemies in high places. Crispo's book was dedicated to Cardinal Odoardo Farnese; and one of the theologians who examined and approved it for publication was the powerful Dominican, Giovanni Pietro di Saragozza, who held the post of colleague to the Master

de coelo [Ficino, *Opera omnia*, pp. 1593–1604] nulla plane cautione adhibita cum Proclo et Porphyrio philosophatur, variasque et ipse rationes, quasi eam probaret sententiam, commentatur, quibus illam confirmet; et (ut dicam paucis) argumentum hoc gravissimum tanta libertate tractat, ut eum etsi pium alioquin et (quod alia eius scripta indicant) erga divinas literas egregie affectus, non Christianum esse sentias sed Ethnicum, atque Ethnicum more philosophari.'

⁷⁵ See the article on Crispo by A. Romano, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, XXX (1984), pp. 806–08.

⁷⁶ Giovan Battista Crispo, *De ethnicis philosophis caute legendis ex propriis cuiusque principis, quinarius primus*, Rome, 1594.

⁷⁷ See the 'Philosophorum catalogus, quorum, seu typis impressa, seu manuscripta, vel ab aliis relata dogmata, caute legenda ab auctore proponuntur', *ibid.*, sig. A5r.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, sig. A7r: 'Huius paene prostrati saeculi Lutherus, Calvinus, Melanchthones et alios huiuscemodi sexcentos non esset cur tanto dolore vobis enarrando recenserem, cum in eorum commentariis omnium factis aut etiam dictis nihil tam turpe factum aut dictum sit quod ex philosophorum et uno potissimum Platonis fonte ab illis non exhaustum invenias.'

⁷⁹ See Muccillo, 'Il platonismo all'Università di Roma', p. 229. Patrizi recommended Crispo for the post after Antonio Persio and Paolo Beni, and with much less enthusiasm: see Gregory, 'L'"Apologia" e le "Declarationes" di F. Patrizi', pp. 389–90, n. 9: 'Il terzo è un signor Giovanni Battista Crispi, che ha finito di stampare . . . un'opera contra Platone.'

of the Sacred Palace and who two years earlier had written a very severe report censuring Patrizi's Platonic treatise.⁸⁰

Crispo states at the outset of the work that he was advised by some distinguished theologians, including Robert Bellarmine, Cesare Baronio and Antonio Possevino, that the opinions of certain Catholics which were too indulgent towards pagan ideas should be subjected to the same censure as the pagan writings themselves. It was under this heading that he denounced various errors committed by Ficino. Other recent authors also received this treatment: Crispo is particularly hard, for instance, on Agostino Steuco, the erudite Vatican librarian whose concordist tendencies were displayed in his 1542 treatise *On the Perennial Philosophy* and also in his 1535 commentary on the first book of Genesis, in which he drew on a wide range of pagan philosophical sources and which appeared in the 1584 and 1596 Index of Prohibited Books.⁸¹ Paolo Beni had been inclined to let Steuco off the hook, largely one suspects because they were both proud citizens of Gubbio, *campanilismo* outweighing the philosophical differences which separated them.⁸² But Crispo lets neither him nor Ficino get away with blurring the distinction between the Judaeo-Christian and Platonic traditions, reproaching Steuco for making an 'odious comparison' between Plato and Moses,⁸³ and complaining that 'Ficino everywhere taints the sacred with the profane'.⁸⁴

Like Beni, Crispo sometimes finds Ficino to be more of a Platonist than a Christian, as, for instance, when he discusses the aethereal vehicle of the soul in the *Platonic Theology*.⁸⁵ He, too, points out that

⁸⁰ Crispo, *De ethnicis philosophis*, sig. A4v; on his role in the censorship of Patrizi's *Nova de universis philosophia* see Gregory, 'L'"Apologia" e le "Declarationes" di F. Patrizi', p. 391; and Muccillo, 'Il platonismo all'Università di Roma', p. 231.

⁸¹ See Mariano Crociata, *Umanesimo e teologia in Agostino Steuco*, Rome, 1987. See *Index de l'Inquisition espagnole 1583, 1584*, ed. by J. M. De Bujanda, Sherbrooke and Geneva, 1993, pp. 184, 270, 788–89, and *Index de Rome 1590, 1593, 1596*, p. 466, for Steuco's *Cosmopoeia*.

⁸² See Rotondò, 'Cultura umanistica e difficoltà di censori', pp. 40–44.

⁸³ See C. B. Schmitt, 'Perennial Philosophy from Agostino Steuco to Leibniz', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 27 (1966), pp. 505–32, at p. 526.

⁸⁴ Crispo, *De ethnicis philosophis*, p. 106: 'Ficinus . . . ubique sacra profanis inficit'.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 447: 'si vehiculo aethereo tamquam animae coniuncto, et post mortem sibi derelicto, aliquid ipse tribuat, Ficinum certe tamquam Platonicum agnosco; sed tamquam Christianum in hac cautione aegre admitto.' See Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne de l'immortalité des âmes*, ed. and tr. by R. Marcel, 3 vols, Paris, 1964–70, III, pp. 192–96 (XVIII.4). On the aethereal vehicle or body in Ficino's philosophy, see M. J. B. Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of his 'Phaedrus' Commentary, its Sources and Genesis*, Berkeley etc., 1984, pp. 12–13, 97–98, 102–03, 218–19.

Ficino frequently adopts the views of the Neoplatonists as his own. Thus, after setting out the mistaken belief of Plotinus and Proclus that human beings are composed only of a soul, which merely uses the body as its instrument, Crispo says that this doctrine pleased Ficino so much that he used it in countless passages.⁸⁶

Crispo's particular angle on Ficino, however, was that when he espoused Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrines, he fell into error; and when he embraced the truth, that is, when he agreed with Christian dogma, he distorted and misrepresented Plato. So, when Ficino maintained in the *Platonic Theology* that the soul was distributed throughout the entire body, he was corroborating the truth, but destroying Plato's doctrine of the tripartite division of the soul.⁸⁷ Likewise, Ficino's statement, in a letter to Alamanno Donati, that there was only one soul, which had several faculties, not only had nothing at all to do with Plato, it actually undermined the philosopher's teaching and arguments.⁸⁸ 'Everywhere', says Crispo, 'Ficino establishes what should rightly be thought on natural grounds rather than Platonic ones. So that very often it happens with him that in a quite childlike way he deceives himself first of all and then many others with regard to Plato, either because he is ashamed of all the effort that he has put into expounding this one pagan author, or because he really feels this way, perhaps in imitation of St Thomas, who frequently brings Aristotle's words into line with the Church or gives them an acceptable sense.'⁸⁹

This sentence, which seems to align Ficino with Thomas Aquinas but also presents him as a muddled and unreliable interpreter of

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 339: 'Horum [sc. Plotini et Procli] . . . sententiam adeo Marsilio Ficino placuisse videmus, ut ipsam plusquam sexcentis in locis amplexaretur'. See Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.7.1 and VI.7.4-5; and Proclus, *In Platonis Primum Alcibiadem*; the doctrine derives from Plato, *First Alcibiades*, 129c-130c.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 306: 'veritatem corroborando, Platonem ipsum destruet'; see Ficino, *Théologie platonicienne*, ed. Marcel, III, pp. 263-84 (VII.1-15).

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 307: 'Haec cum Ficinus respondeat . . . recte quidem et pro veritate nihil prohibet, sed pro Platone nihil ad rem, cuius doctrina et argumentationes huiuscemodi responsione labefactantur potius'. See Ficino, *Epistolarum liber II*, in *Opera omnia*, pp. 716-17.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 306: '[Ficinus] . . . potius, quid recte sentiendum, ex naturae, quam ex Platonis fundamentis ostendit. Unde saepenumero ab ipso factum est, ut pueriliter admodum seipsum primum, deinde complurimos in Platone deluserit; sive, quod pudeat sui laboris in uno ethnico exponendo, sive quod ita sentiat, fortasse D. Thomam imitatus, qui Aristotelis verba non raro ad Ecclesiam, vel ad tolerabilem sensum trahit.'

Plato, was quoted by the Jesuit Possevino in the second edition, published in 1603, of his *Bibliotheca selecta*,⁹⁰ an annotated bibliography of books he deemed suitable for the education of young Catholic aristocrats.⁹¹ Although Possevino prefaces the quotation by stating that Ficino wrote many learned and pious works,⁹² Crispo's negative assessment of Ficino's Platonism nonetheless became enshrined in what has been described as 'the encyclopedia of the Counter-Reformation'.⁹³

In late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Rome Ficino's stock was at an all-time low. This was partly due to perceived failings in his work, above all his insufficiently discriminating acceptance of Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrines—a criticism which goes back, as we have seen, to Pico and Poliziano a century earlier—and his immoderate desire to reconcile Platonism and Christianity. But in fairness to Ficino it was also a consequence of the very restrictive climate in Rome during this period, as is witnessed by the censorship of his fellow Platonist Francesco Patrizi, not to mention the tragic fate of Giordano Bruno. Ficino, too, was a victim of the times; but luckily for him, it was only his reputation that was at stake.

⁹⁰ Antonio Possevino, *Bibliotheca selecta de ratione studiorum, ad disciplinas et salutem omnium gentium procurandam. Recognita novissime . . . et aucta*, 2 vols, Venice, 1603, II, p. 35. Before quoting the sentence, Possevino refers to: 'Io. Baptista Crispus, cuius in . . . Ficinum expectamus, quas in suo Animario Platonico pollicitus est, Animadversiones'. Rotondò, 'Cultura umanistica e difficoltà di censori', p. 49, claims that this is a reference to a lost work, seen by Possevino, entitled *Animadversiones in animarium Platonicum Marsili Ficini*, from which the quotation is taken; and Romano, in his article on Crispo in the *Dizionario biografico*, p. 807, also mentions a lost work of this title. But, as we have seen, the quotation comes from *De ethnicis* (see n. 89 above); and 'Animarium Platonicum' is the title Crispo gives to his account of Plato's doctrine of the soul: see sig. A4v. The 'Animadversiones' mentioned by Possevino probably refer to Crispo's statement, p. 339, that what he says here about Ficino is taken 'ex iis, quae in ipsum alibi parata sunt'; he ends by saying: 'sed nescio quo impellente haec alibi alioqui apponenda modo hic sint a me dicta'.

⁹¹ See A. Biondi, 'La *Bibliotheca selecta* di Antonio Possevino: un progetto di egemonia culturale', in *La 'Ratio studiorum': modelli culturali e pratiche educative dei Gesuiti in Italia tra Cinque e Seicento*, ed. by G. P. Brizzi, Rome, 1981, pp. 43–75.

⁹² Possevino, *Bibliotheca selecta*, II, p. 35: 'Ficinus plura docte ac pie scripsit, sed qui potius (ut cordate Crispus adnotavit) quid recte sentiendum . . .'

⁹³ Quoted in J. P. Donnelly, 'Antonio Possevino's Plan for World Evangelization', *Catholic Historical Review*, 74 (1988), pp. 179–98.

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FICINO AND COPERNICUS¹

Dilwyn Knox

Did Copernicus read Ficino? And if he did, what did he learn from him? These are, it should be emphasized, not just questions about the influence of one author on another. They raise the possibility that the Renaissance revival of Platonism, of which Ficino was the chief architect, helped to lay the foundations for the most significant intellectual achievement of the Renaissance—the formulation of a geokinetic, heliocentric cosmos—and so helped to inspire the development of modern science. Many scholars have proposed that Copernicus did study Ficino or, more vaguely, that he was influenced by Florentine Neoplatonism, but none has made a convincing case.² Kristeller wisely refrained from passing judgement, commenting only that Ficino's influence on Copernicus remained uncertain.³ In this paper I shall reassess the evidence that has been presented previously and follow up some additional clues that have been overlooked.

Biographical and Bibliographical Evidence

We can eliminate at the outset one false lead. It has often been suggested that Domenico Maria da Novara (1454–1504), with whom Copernicus studied astronomy during his stay at Bologna from 1496 to 1500, was a devotee of Florentine Platonism or Pythagoreanism.

¹ I should like to thank Christopher Ligota and Kristian Jensen for helping me with passages of Polish and Swedish respectively. I have used the following abbreviations: *CGA* = Copernicus, *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by H. M. Nobis et al., vol. I–, Hildesheim and Berlin, 1974–; *CH* = *Corpus Hermeticum*, ed. by A. D. Nock, French tr. by A.-J. Festugière, 4 vols, vols I and II paginated consecutively, Paris, 1945–54. A number immediately following a full stop in references to page or column numbers denotes a line number.

² To date the most detailed treatment of Ficino's possible influence on Copernicus is B. Biliński, *Il pitagorismo di Niccolò Copernico*, Wrocław etc., 1977, pp. 96–103, 144–53. For further references to interpretations of this kind, see nn. 4 and 31 below.

³ P. O. Kristeller, *Marsilio Ficino and his Work after Five Hundred Years*, Florence, 1987, p. 15.

He might, therefore, the argument goes, have inspired similar interests in Copernicus.⁴ There is no documentary evidence for this claim. Novara did, it is true, propose several revisions to the Ptolemaic system. And there is some evidence, usually ignored, that Novara entertained the possibility of a heliocentric system.⁵ But even if he did, we cannot assume that he adhered to Neoplatonism or Pythagoreanism.⁶ As a professional astronomer-astrologer, he may have considered heliocentrism solely from a mathematical standpoint.

⁴ This idea goes back to, I believe, D. Stimson, *The Gradual Acceptance of the Copernican Theory of the Universe*, New York, 1917, p. 25, who cites in corroboration A. M. Clerke's entry, 'Astronomy', in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn, 29 vols, Cambridge, 1910-11, II, p. 811. Many scholars have since repeated it: see E. A. Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science*, London, 1925, pp. 42-44, citing Stimson; A. Armitage, *Copernicus, the Founder of Modern Astronomy*, London, 1938, p. 47; T. S. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought*, Cambridge, Mass., 1957, p. 128; B. Biliński, *Alcune considerazioni su Niccolò Copernico e Domenico Maria Novara (Bologna 1497-1500)*, Wrocław etc., 1975, pp. 34-35, claiming that Novara's Platonic sympathies are revealed in his surviving prognostications, which cite 'platonici e arabi come Albumasaro' and speak 'dell'ordine e della perfezione dello Universo di fronte alle cose variabili di questo mondo'. Citations and sentiments of this kind are too generic to support Biliński's conclusion. For Domenico Maria da Novara (or 'da Ferrara'), see E. Rosen, 'Novara', in *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, 18 vols, New York, 1970-90, X, pp. 153-54; idem, 'Regiomontanus', *ibid.*, XI, p. 352; idem, 'Copernicus and His Relation to Italian Science', in *Copernico e la cosmologia moderna*, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Anno 372, Quaderno 216, Rome, 1975, pp. 27-37; Biliński, *Alcune considerazioni*, *passim*.

⁵ A. Libanori, *Ferrara d'oro imbrunito*, 3 vols, Ferrara, 1665-74, III, pp. 80-81, claimed that Novara contemplated the possibility of a system similar to Aristarchus's and, anticipating Galileo, conjectured that tides derived from the earth's annual and diurnal motions. Libanori is the ultimate source for later comments to the same effect. We should, of course, allow for distortions produced by civic pride, yet Libanori's claims cannot be dismissed out of hand. His entry on Novara presumably draws on a letter of 3 January 1635 written by the Ferrarese doctor and philosopher Giovanni Libiola to Marcantonio Guarini. Libanori cites this letter towards the end of his entry on Novara (as cited above), mentioning that Conte Lelio Roverella had brought it to his attention and that autograph copies of Novara's works, together with Libiola's letter, were in Roverella's archive. If, as seems likely, Libiola's long letter drew on Novara's unpublished works in that archive, then his claims would have to be considered seriously. Unfortunately the manuscripts are now lost. For comments on their possible whereabouts, see Biliński, *Alcune considerazioni*, pp. 32-33.

⁶ Scholars disagree over when Copernicus first considered a heliocentric alternative to Ptolemy's system. Some suggest he did so while a student at Cracow, others while at Bologna from 1496 to 1500, others again prefer a date of 1508, by which time Copernicus was in Ermeland; see the bibliography in Biliński, *Il pitagorismo*, pp. 43, n. 4, 60; E. Rosen's and E. Rybka's contributions to a conference discussion reported in *Copernico e la cosmologia moderna*, pp. 171-72, 174-75; and F. Schmeidler, *Kommentar zu 'De revolutionibus'*, CGA, III, pt. 1, Berlin, 1998, p. 1, with further references. The debate is strongly coloured by national prejudices.

That said, the opening chapters of *De revolutionibus* leave no doubt that Copernicus was interested in Platonism, Neoplatonism and related strands of thought such as Pythagoreanism. Copernicus quotes from the Middle Platonic author Plutarch (and ps.-Plutarch) on several occasions.⁷ In particular he quoted a well-known passage in the *Placita philosophorum*, falsely attributed at the time to Plutarch, to support his thesis that the earth moved.⁸ The Pythagorean Philolaus, Plutarch reported, thought that the earth, sun, moon and the other planets orbited a central fire.⁹ And another Pythagorean, Ecphantus, Plutarch says in the same passage, had claimed that the earth rotates around its axis.¹⁰ Again, Copernicus read Bessarion's *In calumniatorem Platonis*, a copy of which was in his library, and annotated his notice that Plato had visited Philolaus the Pythagorean in Italy.¹¹ In the margin

⁷ In addition to the comments on Philolaus's and Ecphantus's cosmology that Copernicus found in the *Placita philosophorum*, see (1) Copernicus, *De revolutionibus*, I [praef.], CGA, II, p. 488.8-9 (in a passage omitted from the *editio princeps*), referring to Plutarch, *Quaestiones Romanae*, XXIV.269d, ed. Nachstädt et al., p. 287.15-19, though, as Schmeidler, *Kommentar*, p. 179, notes, Plutarch speaks of the moon's rather than the sun's movements; and (2) *De revolutionibus*, I.3, CGA, II, p. 9.14-17, following ps.-Plutarch's account of ancient philosophers' views of the earth's shape in ps.-Plutarch (i.e., Aëtius), *Placita philosophorum*, III.10, 895d, ed. Mau, pp. 106.16-107.5, though Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, I.8.2, provides a better fit for Copernicus's comment that, according to Anaximander, the earth was cylindrically shaped. (Copernicus's translation of this passage of the *Placita philosophorum* differs from that of Giorgio Valla in Valla's *De expetendis et fugiendis rebus opus*, Venice, 1501, sig. kk7v [XXI.41-42].) In the second passage Copernicus comments that Empedocles and Heraclitus thought the earth flat and bowl-shaped respectively. Ps.-Plutarch does not say this. He does, however, report in an earlier chapter that Empedocles and Heraclitus thought the moon was, respectively, in the shape of a flat disc and a bowl (*Placita philosophorum*, II.26, 891c, ed. Mau, p. 95.11-12). Did Copernicus confuse the two accounts? For further possible borrowings from the *Placita philosophorum*, see nn. 23 and 54 below. For Copernicus's references to Plutarch, see A. Birkenmajer, 'Kopernik jako filozof', *Studia i Materiały z Dziejów Nauki Polskiej*, Seria C, fasc. 7 (1963), pp. 31-63, at pp. 43-44 (French tr., 'Copernic philosophe', in Birkenmajer's *Études d'histoire des sciences en Pologne*, Wrocław, 1972, pp. 612-46 at pp. 626-28).

⁸ Ps.-Plutarch (i.e., Aëtius), *Placita philosophorum*, III.13, 896a, ed. Mau, p. 108.2-8. For Copernicus's quotation of this passage, see Biliński, *Il pitagorismo*, pp. 47-48, 53-57, 61-66. Valla, *De expetendis*, sig. kk7v (XXI.45), translates ps.-Plutarch's comment into Latin; Copernicus quotes it in Greek in his preface. This eliminates the possibility that Copernicus's citations from the *Placita philosophorum* derive solely from *De expetendis*. Copernicus may have known Valla's work; see n. 59 below.

⁹ Copernicus, *De revolutionibus*, praef. and I.5, CGA, II, pp. 4.37-38, 11.21-25. In the holograph of *De revolutionibus*, I.11, Copernicus also mentioned Philolaus's theory in a passage omitted from the first four editions of 1543, 1566, 1617 and 1854; see CGA, II, p. 488.29.

¹⁰ Copernicus, *De revolutionibus*, praef., and I.5, CGA, II, pp. 4.38, 11.9-10.

¹¹ Bessarion, *In calumniatorem Platonis*, I.5.1, in L. Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als*

he wrote: 'Plato's travels'.¹² Bessarion's comment was the source for Copernicus's observation, made in connection with Philolaus's planetary system, that the latter's mathematical abilities were such that Plato had travelled to Italy to visit him.¹³ Copernicus's disciple Georg Joachim Rheticus confirms Copernicus's Platonic and Pythagorean sympathies. In his account of Copernicus's heliocentric system, the *Narratio prima* written at Frombork in September 1539 and published in 1540, he noted that his master followed the Pythagoreans and Plato in proposing that the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies should be attributed to the earth's motions.¹⁴ The reference to Plato presumably is to *Timaeus* 40B9–10, where Timaeus, according to one interpretation, can be construed to mean that the earth rotated around its axis at the centre of the cosmos.¹⁵

Nor can there be much doubt that Copernicus knew Plato's works, or at least some of them, in Ficino's Latin translations.¹⁶ He certainly used Ficino's translation of the *Laws*. The introduction to the first book in Copernicus's holograph of *De revolutionibus* confirms this. (The *editio princeps* of 1543 omits the introduction.) Here Copernicus

Theologe, Humanist und Staatsmann, 3 vols, Paderborn, 1923–42, II, pp. 56.10, 57.11. Copernicus consulted the 1503 Aldine edition of the Latin version of Bessarion's work. The passage concerning Plato's visit to Philolaus is on fol. 8v of this edition; see Rosen in Copernicus, *Complete Works*, vol. I–, London etc., 1972–, II, p. 349. Copernicus also consulted Bessarion's Latin translation of Lysis's letter to Hipparchus (*In calumniatorem*, ed. Mohler, I.2.3, pp. 13.23–15.34). He gave his own translation of the letter in the holograph of *De revolutionibus*, I.11 (*CGA*, II, pp. 489.3–490.4), but omitted it from the published version. For details, see Rosen in Copernicus, *Complete Works*, II, pp. 361–63; E. Garin, 'Copernico e i filosofi italiani del Rinascimento', *Belfagor*, 28 (1973), pp. 664–84, at pp. 671–72; Biliński, *Il pitagorismo*, pp. 66–67, 86–87, 169–78.

¹² L. A. Birkenmajer, *Mikotaj Kopernik*, Cracow, 1900, p. 131: 'Platonis peregrinatio' (quoted in translation by Rosen in Copernicus, *Complete Works*, II, p. 349). For Copernicus's copy of *In calumniatorem Platonis*, see P. Czartoryski, 'The Library of Copernicus', in *Science and History: Studies in Honor of Edward Rosen*, ed. by E. Hilfstein, P. Czartoryski and F. D. Grande, Wrocław etc., 1978, pp. 355–96, at pp. 356, 364, 367 §4.

¹³ Copernicus, *De revolutionibus*, I.5, *CGA*, II, p. 11.21–25. The passage is in the holograph of *De revolutionibus* but is omitted from the *editio princeps*.

¹⁴ G. J. Rheticus, *Narratio prima*, ed., with French tr. and comm., by H. Hugonnard-Roche, J.-P. Verdet, M.-P. Lerner and A. Segonds, Wrocław etc., 1982, p. 61 (XI.3–6). Cf. *ibid.*, p. 62 (XI.55–56).

¹⁵ For interpretations of Plato, *Timaeus*, 40B9–10, see D. Knox, 'Ficino, Copernicus and Bruno on the Motion of the Earth', *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 5 (1999), pp. 333–66, at pp. 335–36, 341–42, 351.

¹⁶ Copernicus mentions Plato six times in the holograph of *De revolutionibus*: (1) he quotes passages from the *Laws*, mentioning Plato by name (see above); (2) he correctly cites a passage in the *Timaeus* concerning the order of the planets (see

paraphrases two passages in the *Laws* in which the Athenian stranger extols astronomy as a discipline beneficial to both state and individual. The wording derives unmistakably from Ficino's translation.¹⁷ This is an important clue, for during Copernicus's lifetime Ficino's translation of the *Laws* was not printed separately or in a selection of Plato's works. The only place that Copernicus could have consulted it was in one of the eight editions of Ficino's Latin Plato published before 1543. The editions were as follows: Florence 1484, Venice 1491, Venice 1517, Paris 1518, Paris 1522, Basel 1532, Paris 1533 and Basel 1539.¹⁸ We can limit the possibilities to the first five of these editions if we accept the prevailing view that Copernicus had probably completed the first book of *De revolutionibus*—the book in which the quotation from the *Laws* occurs—by 1525 or 1526.¹⁹

This conclusion suggests that Copernicus knew, or at least knew of, Ficino's translations of other Platonic dialogues, all of which, again, appear in the pre-1543 editions of his Latin Plato. In particular it suggests that Copernicus took his citations of the *Timaeus*, or at least one of them, from Ficino's Latin Plato rather than one of

p. 404 below); (3) he claims that Plato thought few contemporaries were skilled in astronomy, without indicating where he did so (see p. 404 below); (4) he mistakenly attributes some Greek planetary names to Plato in the *Timaeus* (see n. 23 below); (5) he repeats Bessarion's account of Plato's visit to Philolaus (see p. 402 above); and (6) he considers arguments that 'those who follow Plato' propose for believing that the sun was below Venus, Mercury, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn (*CGA*, II, p. 17.29). The last two references (5–6) do not, obviously, directly concern Plato's works. For references to Plato in *De revolutionibus*, see Birkenmajer, 'Kopernik jako filozof', pp. 44–46 (French tr., pp. 628–29); Biliński, *Il pitagorismo*, p. 144.

¹⁷ See Copernicus, *De revolutionibus*, I [praef.], *CGA*, II, p. 487.28–30: 'ut per eam diem . . . redderent civitatem', 31–33: 'et multum abesse . . . habeat cognitionem', 30–31: 'et si quis . . . stultissime cogitabit', paraphrasing respectively *Laws*, VII, 809c6–d5, 818c2–d1, 818d1–3 in Plato, *Opera*, in Ficino's Latin translation (with his commentaries, summaries and other matter related to Plato and the Platonic corpus), 2 parts, Florence, 1484, II, sig. iilra: 'Item que ad divinorum . . . vigilantemque reddant', iivb: 'longe etiam . . . accepit', 'Que siquis . . . stultissime cogitabit'.

¹⁸ See J. Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Leiden etc., 1990, pp. 739–57, at pp. 740–42, 749–51, 753–54, 756, nos 5, 8, 30, 32, 37, 43, 46, 52.

¹⁹ For the date, see Schmeidler, *Kommentar*, p. 3; Edward Rosen, 'When did Copernicus Write the *Revolutions*?', *Sudhoffs Archiv*, 61 (1977), pp. 144–55, against N. M. Swerdlow, 'The Holograph of *De Revolutionibus* and the Chronology of its Composition', *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, 5 (1974), pp. 186–98, who argues that parts of Copernicus's holograph date from 1525 at the earliest and probably several years after that (p. 188); and that Copernicus wrote the entire MS probably between c. 1530 and 1541 (p. 194). Copernicus wrote his preface in June 1542; see Rosen, p. 146, and Schmeidler, *Kommentar*, pp. 1, 73.

the two self-standing editions of Ficino's translation of the *Timaeus*, without his commentary,²⁰ or Chalcidius's or Cicero's translations. Copernicus refers to the *Timaeus* once, perhaps twice. In the tenth chapter of the first book of *De revolutionibus* he records accurately the order of the planets given in the *Timaeus*.²¹ In the following chapter, following the holograph rather than the *editio princeps*, Copernicus mentions Plato's comment that very few in his day were learned in the theory of the stars' motions ('sydereorum motuum . . . rationem'). This is possibly an allusion to a passage in the *Timaeus*, immediately following the account of the planets' order mentioned above, in which Timaeus defers discussion of the positions of the fixed stars to another occasion on the grounds that it is a complicated matter.²² (Copernicus cites the *Timaeus* on a third occasion but his reference is wrong; he may have had in mind a passage in the *Placita philosophorum* reporting Plato's views, or rather attributing views to him.)²³ Further, we

²⁰ Hankins, *Plato*, pp. 752, 755–56, nos 39, 49.

²¹ Copernicus, *De revolutionibus*, I.10, *CGA*, II, p. 17.27, citing *Timaeus*, 38D1–4.

²² Copernicus, *De revolutionibus*, I.11, *CGA*, II, p. 488.32–34 (crossed out in the holograph), citing *Timaeus*, 38D6–E3. A. Birkenmajer, 'Kopernik jako filozof', pp. 45–46 (French tr., pp. 628–29), declined to identify this passage.

²³ The reference to Plato's *Timaeus* at *De revolutionibus*, V, intro., *CGA*, II, p. 339.10–15, has puzzled Copernicus scholars. Copernicus cites Plato as the authority for the Greek names of five of the planets: Φαίτων, Φαέθων, Πυρρός, Φωσφόρος, and Στίλβων. Plato does not use these planetary names. Scholars have suggested as sources: (1) Cicero, *De natura deorum*, II.20.52–53, ed. Ax, pp. 69.15–70.5, suggested by, e.g., Franz Zeller and Karl Zeller in Copernicus, *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by F. and K. Zeller, 2 vols, Munich, 1944–49, II, p. 451; Biliński, *Il pitagorismo*, p. 144; and, with reservations, by A. Birkenmajer, 'Kopernik jako filozof', pp. 43, 45 (French tr., pp. 625–26, 628); or (2) Chalcidius, *Commentarius in Timaeum*, chs 70, 87, ed. Waszink, pp. 113.6–8, 117.10–118.13, 138.17–139.5, suggested by Jerzy Dobrzycki in Copernicus, *De revolutionibus*, ed. by R. Gansiniec, J. Domański and J. Dobrzycki, comm. A. Birkenmajer (Bk. I, chs 1–11) and J. Dobrzycki (for the remainder) in a Latin trans. by A. Kempf, J. Wojtczak and J. Danielewicz, *Academia Scientiarum Polona, Nicolai Copernici Opera omnia*, vol. II, Warsaw, 1975, p. 421; Rosen in Copernicus, *Complete Works*, II, pp. 416–17. These attributions are unconvincing, as Schmeidler, *Kommentar*, p. 145, notes. Nothing in these sources proves that Copernicus consulted them—Chalcidius does not mention Φωσφόρος—rather than one or more of the many other classical sources that mentioned these planetary names, for which see F. Cumont, 'Les noms des planètes et l'astrologie chez les grecs', *L'Antiquité classique*, 4 (1935), pp. 5–43; W. and H. Gundel, 'Planeten', in *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. by G. Wissowa et al., 34 vols, 15 supplementary vols, Stuttgart and Munich, 1894–1980, XL (1950), cols 2017–85 at cols 2030–31. The most plausible source, suggested by Zeller and Zeller in Copernicus, *Gesamtausgabe*, II, p. 451, but ignored by later scholars, is ps.-Plutarch, *Placita philosophorum*, II.15, 889b, ed. Mau, p. 88.5–9, in the original Greek rather than in Giorgio Valla's translation (see Valla, *De expetendis*, XXI.15, sig. kk6r). Ps.-Plutarch is the only source to claim that Plato used these planetary names (see

can probably assume, especially in the light of Rheticus's statement mentioned above, that Copernicus consulted *Timaeus* 40B9–10, where Timaeus supposedly states that the earth rotates around its axis at the centre of the cosmos. Certainly he knew Cicero's comment in the *Academica* that Plato, according to some interpretations, held this view.²⁴

Copernicus could have read Ficino's Latin Plato at any stage of his career, before, during or after his sojourn in Italy. Ficino's collection enjoyed immediate success in Poland. The Jagellonian Library holds four complete copies and one incomplete copy of the 1484 edition. Among them is a copy (Inc. 1358) that served, according to a note in a late fifteenth-century hand at the front, as the university copy ('Opera Platonis Universitatis'). Notes in this and the other three complete copies show that they were available to doctors or masters of the Jagellonian University by 1490.²⁵ There were other channels, too, outside the university, through which Copernicus could have come across Ficino's Latin Plato, even before he arrived in Italy.²⁶ In April 1485, for instance, Ficino had sent, or claimed to have sent, Callimachus Experiens a copy of the 1484 edition.²⁷ Callimachus (Filippo Buonaccorsi) had been resident in Poland since

Cumont, 'Les noms', p. 30). Ps.-Plutarch does not, admittedly, specify the *Timaeus*, but a few lines down in the same chapter he describes Plato as a mathematician (ed. Mau, p. 88.10). This might have encouraged Copernicus to think that ps.-Plutarch had the *Timaeus* in mind. Copernicus studied the *Placita philosophorum* (see p. 401 above).

²⁴ Cicero, *Academica priora*, II.39.123, ed. Plasberg, p. 89.11–12. Copernicus transcribed Plasberg, p. 89.6–12 into his copy of Pliny's *Natural History* (see n. 40 below) and cited it at *De revolutionibus*, praef. and I.5, *CGA*, II, pp. 4.34–35, 11.9–10, without, however, mentioning Cicero's reference to Plato's geokinetic thesis in the *Timaeus*; see L. A. Birkenmajer, *Mikolaj Kopernik*, p. 560, and the facsimile facing p. 567; Biliński, *Il pitagorismo*, pp. 50, 52–57.

²⁵ See L. A. Birkenmajer, *Stromata Copernicana*, Cracow, 1924, pp. 80–81, n. 6; *Incunabula typographica Bibliothecae Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis*, ed. by W. Wisłocki, Cracow, 1900, p. 385. (I assume that Inc. 888 and Inc. 1357 originally formed a two-volume set, since they belonged to the same person.) For the owners, see, besides Birkenmajer, Biliński, *Il pitagorismo*, p. 145 (mistakenly counting six copies); J. Domański, 'La fortuna di Marsilio Ficino in Polonia nei secoli XV e XVI', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Studi e documenti*, ed. by G. C. Garfagnini, 2 vols, Florence, 1986, II, pp. 565–86, at pp. 569–70.

²⁶ For channels through which Renaissance Platonism was or might have been known in Poland, particularly in Cracow, where Copernicus was a student, see Biliński, *Il pitagorismo*, pp. 124–53.

²⁷ Ficino, letter dated 18 April 1485, in his *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basel, 1576; repr. Turin, 1959 etc., p. 870.40–41. (Ficino does not indicate Callimachus's whereabouts in the letter, but we know that he was in Lwów on 29

late 1469 or early 1470. He was a close friend of Copernicus's maternal uncle, Łukasz Watzenrode (1447–1512), who had provided for the ten-year old Copernicus, together with his brother and two sisters, after their father's death in 1483. As Bishop of Varmia (1489–1512), he saw to Copernicus's education at Cracow and Bologna—he himself had taken a doctorate in canon law at Bologna—and, about 1497, arranged his election to a canonry of the Varmia Chapter at Frombork (Frauenburg).

There is some evidence, furthermore, that Copernicus might indeed have owned, or had direct access to, a copy of Ficino's 1484 Latin Plato. Uppsala University Library holds a two-volume set of this edition, the first volume of which comes from the cathedral library at Frombork.²⁸ A visitation of 1598 to the cathedral library gives a

Sept. 1485, the date on which he sent a letter to Poliziano.) In a letter of 15 May 1488 Callimachus wrote from Piotrków that Ficino must have divined that his, Callimachus's, house would burn down since he had *not* sent 'his Plato'; see F. Buonaccorsi, *Epistulae selectae*, ed. and tr. by I. Lichońska and G. Pianko, comm. by T. Kowalewski, Wrocław etc., 1967, p. 134. Had Ficino not, after all, sent a copy? Or, less likely, was Ficino referring to a second copy that he had sent? In April 1494 Ficino also sent Callimachus a catalogue of his works and a copy of *De sole* and its companion piece *De lumine*, together with two copies of *De sole* and *De lumine* for two of the latter's friends; see Ficino, letter to Callimachus dated 11 April 1494, in *Opera omnia*, p. 957.6–11. For Callimachus's contacts with Ficino, see Biliński, *Il pitagorismo*, pp. 102–03, 125–29, 146, 152; Domański, 'La fortuna di Marsilio Ficino in Polonia', pp. 565–69. I should like to thank Valery Rees for her advice on Ficino's correspondence with Callimachus.

²⁸ L. A. Birkenmajer, *Stromata*, pp. 306–07; L. A. Birkenmajer and I. Collijn, 'Nova Copernicana', *Bulletin International de l'Académie des Sciences de Cracovie, Classe des Sciences Mathématiques et Naturelles*, Année 1909, Cracow, 1910, pp. 20–36, at p. 32; Czartoryski, 'The Library of Copernicus', pp. 360, 382 §49. In the last mentioned study Małgorzata Golińska-Gięrych and Paweł Czartoryski list Ficino's Plato among the works that they were unable to identify 'unambiguously' as having been consulted by, or in the possession of, Copernicus. They were able to see only the first of the two volumes of Ficino's 1484 edition of Plato. In July 2000 Dr Stephan Borgehammar very kindly consulted the two volumes on my behalf and sent me the following information. The two volumes were originally catalogued as a set with the shelfmark Inc. 32:81–82. Vol. 1 has since been renumbered Copernicana 31, while the shelf mark of vol. 2 remains the same (Inc. 32:82). The two volumes have identical bindings, perhaps dating from the fifteenth century. The modern label on the inside front cover notes the provenance of vol. 1 as the Bibliotheca Varmiensis; this is corroborated by a note, 'Bibliotheca Varmiensis', written in ink on the fly-leaf in what looks like a seventeenth-century hand. The corresponding label in vol. 2, however, gives a different provenance: 'Johannes Thomæ Bureus', i.e. the Swedish scholar, antiquarian and mystic Johan Bure (1568–1652). This suggests that the second volume was not part of the original set that may have been available to Copernicus. Dr Borgehammar also reported to me subsequently that Dr Grażyna Rosińska had consulted the second volume on my behalf and con-

detailed inventory of its holdings. The inventory of philosophical works includes two copies of 'Ficino's works' (it does not specify which) and a copy of 'Plato's works'.²⁹ The latter may correspond to the Plato volumes, or at least to the first of them, now in Uppsala; the Varmian collections were removed to Sweden in 1626 by King Gustavus Adolphus and most of them are now in the University Library at Uppsala.³⁰

Metaphysics and Cosmology

Did Copernicus's knowledge of Ficino's Latin Plato prove important for the development of his heliocentric hypothesis? Did other works or translations by Ficino prove fruitful sources of inspiration? Many scholars—Koyré, Kuhn, Vasoli, Garin and Frances Yates, to mention a few distinguished names—have insisted that Ficino's writings or, more loosely, Renaissance Neoplatonism encouraged Copernicus's interest in heliocentrism. Copernicus's celebrated invocation to the sun in the first book of *De revolutionibus*, they claim, proves that he was imbued with contemporary Neoplatonic ideals, Ficino's or not.³¹ The passage runs as follows:

cluded that the hand-written annotations there were too few and short to permit definite conclusions. She thought that they were probably not by Copernicus, but on the other hand she noted that they occurred next to passages concerning astronomy. I should like to thank Dr Borgehammar and Dr Rosińska for their help.

²⁹ F. Hipler, *Analecta Warmiensia. Studien zur Geschichte der ermländischen Archive und Bibliotheken*, Braunsberg, 1872, p. 61: 'Marsilius Ficinus in albo corio. Opera Georgii Marsilii Ficini in rub. corio. . . Platonis opera in albo corio'. An earlier inventory drawn up by Antonio Possevino in 1578 lists only theological works and does not mention works by Ficino or Plato; see *ibid.*, pp. 41–44.

³⁰ Czartoryski, 'The Library of Copernicus', p. 355.

³¹ This interpretation is older than is commonly recognized; see E. Goldbeck, 'Weltbild und Physik', in *Vom Altertum zur Gegenwart: Die Kulturzusammenhänge in den Hauptepochen und auf den Hauptgebieten*, 2nd edn, Leipzig and Berlin, 1921, pp. 294–308, at pp. 297–99, with special reference to Ficino. It has been frequently repeated, with variations; see, e.g., E. Garin, 'Per la storia della cultura filosofica del Rinascimento', *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia*, 12 (1957), pp. 3–21, at pp. 3–5 (I. Letteratura 'solare'); *idem*, 'Copernico e i filosofi italiani', pp. 677–81; *idem*, 'La rivoluzione copernicana e il moto solare', in *idem*, *Rinascite e rivoluzioni: Movimenti culturali dal XIV al XVIII secolo*, Bari, 1975, pp. 257–81, at pp. 273–77; Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution*, p. 130; A. Koyré, *The Astronomical Revolution: Copernicus, Kepler, Borelli*, London, 1973, p. 66; F. A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, London, 1964, pp. 151–55; Z. Horský, 'La cosmologie de Marsile Ficin', *Acta historiae rerum naturalium necnon technicarum*, Special issue, no. 2, Prague, 1966, pp. 57–68, at pp.

In the middle of all, however, resides the sun. For in this most beautiful temple, who would place this lamp (*lampas*) in any other or better place than this, from where it can illuminate the whole universe all at once? Not unjustly, then, some call the sun the lamp (*lucerna*) of the cosmos, others its mind (*mens*) and others still its governor (*rector*). Trimegistus calls it a visible god, and Sophocles's Electra the 'all-seeing'.³²

Copernicus's cosmos was, we are to believe, a cosmological analogue to the sun-centred metaphysics of Neoplatonism.³³ For Neoplatonists the sun was the perceptible image of God, the centre of all things. Ficino, for one, had exploited this analogy on many occasions, for instance, in his *De sole* and *De lumine*, works that, once again, Copernicus might well have known.³⁴ Ideas of this kind supposedly encouraged Copernicus to place the sun at the centre of the cosmos.

Attractive thought this interpretation may be, I doubt there is any truth in it. None of Copernicus's epithets for the sun, with one possible exception, derive necessarily from Platonic or Neoplatonic sources, let alone Ficino. The description of the sun as a lantern (*lampas*) is common in classical Latin.³⁵ Equally the description of the sun as 'the mind of the cosmos' occurs not only among Middle Platonists and Neoplatonists but also in authors of a quite different sort, for instance, Cicero, Pliny the Elder and the astronomer Firmicus

59–60, 65; C. Vasoli, 'Copernico e la cultura filosofica italiana del suo tempo', *Giornale di fisica*, 14 (1973), pp. 79–107, at pp. 87–89; Biliński, *Il pitagorismo*, pp. 39–43, 68, 71–73, 96–103, 127–28, 146–53 (but cf. n. 52 below); and further literature cited in Schmeidler, *Kommentar*, p. 88.

³² Copernicus, *De revolutionibus*, I.10, *CGA*, II, pp. 20.12–21.1: 'In medio vero omnium residet Sol. Quis enim in hoc pulcherrimo templo lampadem hanc in alio vel meliori loco poneret, quam unde totum simul possit illuminare? Siquidem non inepte quidam lucernam mundi, alii mentem, alii rectorem vocant. Trimegistus visibilem Deum, Sophoclis Electra intuentem omnia.' The best discussion of these epithets remains, in my opinion, that of Aleksander Birkenmajer in Copernicus, *Über die Kreisbewegungen der Weltkörper. Erstes Buch*, Latin text with a German tr., ed. and intro. by G. Klaus, comm. by A. Birkenmajer, Berlin, 1959, pp. 165–66 (Latin tr. in Copernicus, *De revolutionibus*, ed. Gansiniec and others, p. 382).

³³ Goldbeck, 'Weltbild und Physik', pp. 297–99 (comparing Ficino's sun metaphysics in particular); Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution*, p. 130; Koyré, *The Astronomical Revolution*, p. 66; Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, p. 154; Garin, 'Copernico e i filosofi italiani'; pp. 680–81.

³⁴ See n. 27 above.

³⁵ E.g., Virgil, *Aeneid*, III.637; Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, V.610; and further references in *Thesaurus linguae latinae*, VII, p. 910 (sense II.A.2), describing the sun as a *lampas*. Commentators on *De revolutionibus* have not suggested a source for Copernicus's *lucerna*; nor have I found one.

Maternus.³⁶ Again, Ficino may call the sun *rector* (governor) in *De sole*;³⁷ but so does Pliny the Elder, and Pliny is the obvious source.³⁸ The two terms, *mens* and *rector*, applied to the sun, occur in the same section of Pliny's *Natural History*. And at this point, moreover, Pliny, like Copernicus, though with the 'Chaldean' planetary order in mind, says that the sun is the middle of the seven planets.³⁹ We know that Copernicus owned and consulted a copy of Pliny's work.⁴⁰ Nor is the word *templum*, which Ficino also uses of the cosmos, significant.⁴¹ Once again, there is good precedent in sources that cannot be strictly linked to Platonic philosophy. Cicero and Lucretius are just two candidates.⁴²

The only epithet in Copernicus's invocation of the sun that has strong Ficinian connotations is the reference to Hermes Trismegistus.⁴³ Where Copernicus found Hermes's description of the sun as a visible god is uncertain. The sources usually cited are the *Asclepius* and the so-called *Diffinitiones Asclepii*, the final section of the *Pimander*,

³⁶ See Cicero, *Somnium Scipionis*, 9; Pliny, *Historia naturalis*, II.6.13, ed. Mayhoff, I, p. 131.21; Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis*, I.10.14; Ammianus Marcellinus, XXI.1.11: 'sol enim, ut aiunt physici, mens mundi'; Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, I.18.15, I.19.9: 'et sol mundi mens est'; idem, *In somnium Scipionis*, I.20.6. See also Julian, *Hymn to King Helios*, 134a-b.

³⁷ Ficino, *De sole*, ch. 13, in idem, *Liber de sole. Liber de lumine*, Florence, 1493, sig. c1r (= *Opera omnia*, p. 975.33-35), describes the sun as *rector* of the celestial bodies; a few lines earlier (*Opera omnia*, p. 975.21-23), however, he mentions that God is the *rector* of all things because He is immobile, unlike the sun, which moves continually. In an undated letter to the Duke of Württemberg, Ficino repeated ch. 13 of *De sole* with its observations on God and the sun as *rectores* verbatim (*Opera omnia*, pp. 946.51-947.2 and 947.11-13).

³⁸ Pliny, *Historia naturalis*, II.6.12, ed. Mayhoff, I, p. 131.20.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, ed. Mayhoff, I, p. 131.18.

⁴⁰ Copernicus annotated a copy of the 1487 Venice edition of Pliny's *Historia naturalis* (Hain *13096); see L. A. Birkenmajer, *Mikolaj Kopernik*, p. 560; Czartoryski, 'The Library of Copernicus', pp. 357-58, 372; Rosen, in Copernicus, *Complete Works*, II, p. 341.

⁴¹ Copernicus, *De revolutionibus*, I.10, *CGA*, II, p. 20.12; Ficino, *De sole*, ch. 9, sig. b2r (= *Opera omnia*, p. 970.45).

⁴² For *templum* denoting the cosmos or the heavens, see, e.g., Cicero, *De legibus*, II.10.26, *Somnium Scipionis*, 7, 9, *De divinatione*, I.20.41 (quoting Ennius); Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. Martin, I.1014; II.1039; V.521, 1436; VI.388.

⁴³ Cf. E. Rosen, 'Was Copernicus a Hermetist?', in *Historical and Philosophical Perspectives of Science*, ed. by R. H. Struwer, Minneapolis, 1970, pp. 163-71, at pp. 166-68, suggesting Copernicus's epithet might derive indirectly from Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones*, IV.6.4, or *Epitome divinarum institutionum*, 37.5. Lactantius, Rosen claims, quotes Hermes, *Asclepius*, 8, *CH*, II, p. 305.3, saying that God produced a second visible and perceptible cosmos. Hermes, Rosen argues, meant by this the perceptible cosmos, but Lactantius interprets Hermes as meaning Christ. See

which Ludovico Lazzarelli had published in Latin translation for the first time in 1507.⁴⁴ Neither, however, calls the sun 'a visible god'. More plausible is Aleksander Birkenmajer's suggestion, proposed with reservations, that Copernicus is paraphrasing a passage in Ficino's translation of the *Pimander*.⁴⁵ In the fifth discourse to his son, Tat, Hermes describes the invisible, imperceptible realm as the cause of the visible realm. God, though intrinsically invisible, was 'visible' through images.⁴⁶ Hermes then tells his son to raise his eyes to 'the sun, to the course of the moon and harmony of the other stars' so that he can see God.⁴⁷ This resembles Copernicus's comment, yet it is not a perfect fit. Hermes is thinking of the order of the celestial region, not the sun in particular nor any of the other celestial bodies, as an image of God. And there is in any case an unnoticed problem with Birkenmajer's suggestion. In all but two of the twelve printed pre-1525 or 1526 editions of Ficino's *Pimander* the passage in question is defective. They omit *Pimander*'s instruction to Tat to look at the sun to see God, leaving the idea of the sun as a visible god only dimly discernible in his following remarks.⁴⁸

also Rosen in Copernicus, *Complete Works*, II, p. 359. I am not convinced by his explanation.

⁴⁴ Hermes, *Asclepius*, 29 (*CH*, II, p. 336.16–337.5), cited by Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, pp. 154–55; Hermes, *Pimander*, XVI.6–7 (*CH*, II, p. 234.4–13), cited by Nobis and Sticker in *CGA*, II, p. 21. Lazzarelli's Latin translation is edited by C. Vasoli, 'Temi e fonti della tradizione ermetica in uno scritto di Symphorien Champier', in *Umanesimo e esoterismo*, ed. by E. Castelli, Padua, 1960, pp. 251–59; for the passage in question, see p. 253. The Greek text of the final section of the *Pimander* was not published until 1554.

⁴⁵ A. Birkenmajer in Copernicus, *Über die Kreisbewegungen der Weltkörper*, pp. 167–68 (Latin tr., pp. 382–83).

⁴⁶ Hermes, *Pimander*, V.1–2 (*CH*, I, p. 60–61).

⁴⁷ Hermes, *Pimander*, V.3 (*CH*, I, p. 61.8–10): 'εἰ δὲ θέλεις αὐτὸν ἰδεῖν, νόησον τὸν ἥλιον, νόησον τὸν σελήνης δρόμον, νόησον τῶν ἀστέρων τὴν τάξιν.' For Ficino's translation, see Hermes Trismegistus, *Liber de potestate et sapientia dei*, Ferrara, 1472, fol. 14r: 'Denique cum deum videre volueris, suscipe [read: "suspicere"] solem, o fili mi Tati, suscipe lunae cursum: suscipe syderum ordinem reliquorum.'

⁴⁸ The compositor of the *editio princeps* skipped from 'suscipe' to the second occurrence of 'suspicere', thereby omitting the words 'suscipe solem . . . cursum'; see Hermes Trismegistus, *Liber de potestate et sapientia Dei* (i.e., *Pimander*), in Ficino's Latin tr., Treviso, 1471, fol. 20r. This mistake recurs in all pre-1530 editions recorded in the *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum: Mediaeval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries*, ed. by P. O. Kristeller et al., I-, Washington, DC, 1960–, I, p. 139 (the Venice 1483 [Hain 8459] edition listed there is a ghost), apart from the Ferrara 1472 and Florence 1512 editions, which do include the words 'suscipe . . . cursum'. (A. Birkenmajer in Copernicus, *Über die Kreisbewegungen der Weltkörper*, p. 167 (Latin tr., pp. 382–83), cites the Venice 1491 edition and quotes the text in full, but the copy of this edition I have seen (British Library, IA.23787) has the defective read-

Even if we were to grant that Ficino's Latin translation of the *Pimander* was Copernicus's source, it would prove very little. It hardly corroborates on its own the assertion that Copernicus was steeped in contemporary Neoplatonism or Hermeticism, Ficino's version of it or not. It is much simpler to assume that Copernicus's invocation to the sun is just a rag-bag of classical tags—from Pliny, Cicero, Sophocles, Hermes Trismegistus⁴⁹—rather than a bold declaration of Neoplatonic or Hermetic allegiance.⁵⁰ Nor, it should be added, does Rheticus relate Copernicus's sun symbolism to Platonic sources. He speaks of his master's wish to re-establish the sun as emperor of the universe, administering its dominions without hurrying from one city to the next. Or, using another common analogy, found in Platonic and non-Platonic sources alike both before and after Copernicus, the sun was like a heart sustaining the body from its middle.⁵¹

Platonic or Neoplatonic sun symbolism is, to put the matter bluntly, a red herring anyway. What preoccupied Copernicus philosophically was the earth's motion, not the sun's location at the centre of the universe. This is evident from several passing comments that Copernicus makes in the opening chapters of *De revolutionibus*.⁵² It is all the more apparent if we consider how much space Copernicus devotes to the

ing.) These editions therefore omitted Hermes's explicit recommendation to look at the sun ('νόησον τὸν ἥλιον'). The omission also occurs in Ficino, *Opera omnia*, p. 1843.22–23. (Dott. Alessandro Arcangeli kindly consulted the Paris 1522 edition on my behalf.)

⁴⁹ The Sophocles reference is to *Oedipus Coloneus*, 869; it does not come from *Electra*. See Birkenmajer in Copernicus, *Über die Kreisbewegungen der Weltkörper*, p. 168 (Latin tr., p. 383); Rosen in Copernicus, *Complete Works*, II, p. 359. The passages from *Electra* cited by Nobis and Sticker in *CGA*, II, p. 21 are a poor fit.

⁵⁰ According to Biliński, *Il pitagorismo*, pp. 146–48, 151–52, the errors in Copernicus's epithets for the sun ('Trimegistus' rather than 'Trismegistus' and the mistaken reference to the *Electra*) suggest that Copernicus may have taken them from an unidentified florilegium. Another possible source might just be Ficino. As Valery Rees kindly reminded me, Ficino calls the sun a *deus visibilis* in *De sole*, ch. 13, sig. b8r (= *Opera omnia*, p. 974.50–51) and in the undated letter to Eberhard Duke of Württemberg (*Opera omnia*, p. 946.29–30). Copernicus was sometimes imprecise with his citations (see, e.g., nn. 7, 16, 23 and 49 above) and here he might have confused Ficino with Hermes Trismegistus.

⁵¹ Rheticus, *Narratio prima*, p. 56 (VIII.76–82). For the sun as ruler, king, etc., see Biliński, *Il pitagorismo*, pp. 104–05, 108; E. Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200–1687*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 226–27, 233, 311, 452. For the sun as the heart of the planetary system or of the universe, see Cherniss's references in the Loeb edition of Plutarch's *Moralia*, 15 vols, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1927–76, XII, pp. 94–95; Biliński, *Il pitagorismo*, p. 105, and Grant, *Planets*, pp. 227, 233, 452, 577.

⁵² Copernicus, *De revolutionibus*, praef., *CGA*, II, pp. 3.14–16, 4.1, 4.41–5.2: 'Inde

problem. Four chapters (Book I, chs 5, 7, 8, 9) of *De revolutionibus* concern philosophical arguments for and against geokinesis. By contrast, Copernicus devotes just five lines—the passage quoted above—to philosophical or poetical epithets for the sun's immobility at the cosmos's centre. If we want to argue that Ficino's philosophy, or Neoplatonic philosophy generally, made a decisive contribution to Copernicus's hypothesis, then it is not Copernicus's sun symbolism but his arguments in support of geokinesis that should hold our attention.⁵³ Two chapters in *De revolutionibus* concerning geokinesis do indeed introduce a doctrine that has strong Platonic or Neoplatonic resonances.⁵⁴ This is Copernicus's account of gravity, levity and the

igitur occasionem nactus, coepi et ego de terrae mobilitate cogitare', *ibid.*, I.5, *CGA*, II, p. 10.21–24. See also the opening lines of Book I, ch. 12, which Copernicus cancelled in the holograph of *De revolutionibus* (*CGA*, II, p. 490.8–11). Biliński, *Il pitagorismo*, pp. 6–8, 10, 22, 39–50, 58–63, 67–73, 96–97, 103, 146–47, 152–53, 182–84, emphasizes that Copernicus's 'Pythagoreanism' focused on the geokinetic component of the 'Pythagorean' planetary system and that his sun mysticism, which in Biliński's view was inspired by Neoplatonic or Hermetic ideas, perhaps as mediated by Ficino, was of secondary importance in his heliocentric hypothesis.

⁵³ Surprisingly little has been written on Ficino's cosmology; see Horský, 'La cosmologie'; *idem*, 'Le rôle du Platonisme dans l'origine de la cosmologie moderne', *Organon*, 4 (1967), pp. 47–54, at pp. 48–50; A. Ingegno, *Cosmologia e filosofia nel pensiero di Giordano Bruno*, Florence, 1978, pp. 126–46; M. J. B. Allen, 'Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* and its Myth of the Demiurge', in *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. by J. Hankins, J. Monfasani and F. Purnell, Jr., Binghamton, NY, 1987, pp. 399–439, reprinted in Allen's *Plato's Third Eye: Studies in Marsilio Ficino's Metaphysics and its Sources*, Aldershot, 1995; M.-P. Lerner, *Le monde des sphères*, 2 vols, Paris, 1996–97, II, pp. 6–10; J. Hankins, 'Galileo, Ficino and Renaissance Platonism', in *Humanism and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. by J. Kraye and M. W. F. Stone, London, 2000, pp. 209–37. I should like to thank Jill Kraye for drawing my attention to Hankins's article.

⁵⁴ There is an additional detail, again one overlooked in Copernican scholarship, that might at first glance suggest that Copernicus was interested in Platonic or even Ficinian cosmology. In the tenth chapter of the first book Copernicus uses *aether* to denote what would normally be called the sublunary fire sphere; see Copernicus, *De revolutionibus*, I.10, *CGA*, II, p. 18.27–28: 'terram, aerem, aethera, Lunam, atque Mercurium caperet' and (following the holograph reading), *ibid.*, p. 18.22–24: 'nihil tamen aliud in tanto spatio novimus contineri quam aerem, et si placet etiam aethera, quod igneum vocant elementum'. This usage derives ultimately from Plato (see *Timaeus*, 58d1–2, and cf. *Phaedo*, 109b4–110a1, 111a5–b6) and is found in several Platonic sources; see (1) Damascius, *In Phaedonem*, in *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's 'Phaedo'*, vol. I, *Olympiodorus*; vol. II, *Damascius*, ed. and tr. by L. G. Westerink, Oxford and New York, 1976–77, II, p. 245 (I.481); p. 253 (I.497, 499); p. 265 (I.522.10–16); p. 267 (I.523–24); p. 341 (II.96); p. 343 (II.100); p. 355 (II.126); p. 359 (II.134); (2) Proclus, *In Timaeum*, IV.273c–d, 283b, ed. Diehl, III, pp. 111.22–112.17; 142.18; (3) Hierocles, *In aureum Pythagoreorum carmen commentarius*, ed. by F. G. Koehler, Stuttgart, 1974, p. 120.3–8; (4) Chalcidius, *Commentarius in Timaeum*, chs 120, 129, ed. Waszink, pp. 165.2, 172.3–5; (e) ps.-Plato, *Epinomis*, 981b–982a,

natural circular motion of the elements. This doctrine has a complicated history. Here I shall summarize briefly conclusions that I have documented elsewhere.⁵⁵

The most important philosophical—as distinct from mathematical—obstacle that Copernicus had to overcome was Aristotle's doctrine of natural place. Aristotle had taught that the four sublunary elements—fire, air, water and earth—had 'natural places' to which they belonged and sought to return if detached from them. Thus, a clod of earth if raised into the air above the earth's globe sought to return rectilinearly to its place at the centre of the cosmos, irrespective, for the sake of argument, of whether or not there was any earth already there. Similarly, pieces of each of the other three elements, if detached from their proper spheres, sought to return to them. This doctrine was incompatible with Copernicus's heliocentric, geokinetic cosmos. It taught that earth was by nature motionless, whereas Copernicus imagined a terraqueous globe moving by nature around the sun. He therefore proposed an alternative doctrine according to which pieces of the elements, if displaced, sought to return to their wholes, where they resumed circular motion, this circular motion being natural to them. This doctrine explained the diurnal motion of the terraqueous globe. It also dispensed with the

984B–E. Ficino, too, often follows this usage; see Ficino, *De amore*, ed. Marcel, VI.3, p. 202: 'ignis etherei sub luna locati'; *Theologia Platonica*, XVI.6, ed. Marcel, III, p. 128; *Compendium in Timaeum*, chs 17, 24, 26, 39, in Ficino's *Commentaria in Platonem*, Florence, 1496, sigs m3v, m6v, n1r, o4v (= *Opera omnia*, pp. 1445.8–9, 1449.22–23, 1451.4, 1463 *recto*, lines 9–11, with ch. 26 misnumbered and misplaced as ch. 27 and ch. 39 misnumbered as ch. 40); *In Epinomidem* (= *Opera omnia*, p. 1527.45–46); *In Plotinum* (*Enn.* II.1[40].3, 6; III.2[47].3), in Plotinus, *Enneads*, tr. and comm. by Ficino, Florence, 1492, sigs h3v, h6v, s2v (= *Opera omnia*, pp. 1597.7, [1601].38, 1688.13); and Ficino's notes on Olympiodorus in L. G. Westerink, 'Ficino's Marginal Notes on Olympiodorus in Riccardi Greek MS 37', *Traditio*, 24 (1968), pp. 351–78, at pp. 358.46, 359.77–78, 359.93–360.1. (Ficino, it should be said, also uses *aether* in other senses, e.g., to denote cosmic *spiritus*; see *De lumine*, ch. 14, sig. d5r [= *Opera omnia*, p. 984.4–5], referring to Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI.724–27 and quoting VI.730 and *Eclogues*, IV.51; and to denote the celestial simple body; see Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*, X.2, ed. Marcel, II, p. 54.) Ficino might seem a very plausible source for Copernicus's usage were it not that there is a more likely source still, the *Placita philosophorum*, which, as noted at p. 401 above, Copernicus quotes in other contexts; see ps.-Plutarch, *Placita philosophorum*, II.7, 887D, ed. Mau, p. 83.20–21, reporting that Plato made fire the uppermost element, followed by aether, air, water and earth.

⁵⁵ Knox, 'Ficino, Copernicus and Bruno', pp. 339–51. I am preparing an article on Copernicus's doctrine and the tradition to which it belonged, to be entitled 'Copernicus's Doctrine of Gravity, Levity and the Natural Circular Motion of the Elements'.

idea that elements had absolute places relative to the cosmos as a whole. Their 'natural' places were instead wherever the wholes to which God had consigned them happened to be. This principle, noted Copernicus, probably applied to all of the planets alike.

Copernicus's application of this doctrine to a geokinetic cosmos is original but the doctrine itself is not, for several ancient Greek sources propose something very similar. Fire and, according to some sources, air observe by nature circular motion in their spheres and detached parts seek to return rectilinearly to their spheres, where they resume natural circular motion. Earth, water and, some said, air, behaved differently. Pieces detached from their spheres sought to return rectilinearly to them but, once there, they remained still. Doctrines of this kind were proposed by an Aristotelian of the first century BC, Xenarchus, who, untypically of his kind, devoted much of his philosophical energy to criticizing his master, by Plutarch and by Plotinus. Thereafter it became a standard Neoplatonic doctrine. Proclus, Damascius and, in some works, Philoponus adopted it. Philoponus himself described it as a 'Platonic' doctrine. It passed to Arabic and Byzantine thinkers, but seems to have remained unknown to Latin thinkers before Aquinas. Oresme uses it in his *Livre du ciel et du monde*, Cusanus in his *De docta ignorantia* and Giorgio Valla in his *De expetendis et fugiendis rebus*.

Ficino, too, describes it on at least three occasions, in the *Theologia Platonica*, and in his commentaries on the *Timaeus* and Plotinus's *De caelo*.⁵⁶ Given that Copernicus consulted Ficino's Latin translation of Plato, it is very tempting to suppose that Ficino was Copernicus's source, or at least one of his sources.⁵⁷ All eight editions of Ficino's Latin Plato published before 1543 include Ficino's translation of the

⁵⁶ See: (1) *Theologia Platonica*, IV.1, ed. Marcel, I, p. 160; (2) *Compendium in Timaeum*, ch. 25, sig. m6v (= *Opera omnia*, p. 1449.35-48); for a translation, see Hankins, 'Galileo, Ficino and Renaissance Platonism', p. 218; (3) *In Plotinum*, II.1[40].8, sig. h8v (= *Opera omnia*, pp. 1603.60-1604.2). For Ficino's discussion of, and sources for, this doctrine, see Knox, 'Ficino, Copernicus and Bruno', pp. 336-51, and Hankins, p. 220.

⁵⁷ Horský, 'La cosmologie', pp. 63-65. In 'Le rôle du Platonisme', pp. 48-49, Horský discussed Ficino's account of gravity, levity and elemental motion in the *Theologia Platonica* and suggested that Copernicus might have found the doctrine there, as well as in Nicholas of Cusa's works, as P. Duhem, *Études sur Léonard de Vinci*, 3 vols, Paris, 1906-13, II, p. 262, had proposed. He did not substantiate this suggestion or mention Ficino's other discussions of the doctrine. Horský repeated his observations in a conference discussion; see *Avant, avec, après Copernic: La représentation de l'univers et ses conséquences épistémologiques*, Paris, 1975, pp. 97-98.

Timaeus and his commentary on it.⁵⁸ His *Timaeus* commentary would in any case be an obvious work to consult for an astronomer like Copernicus in search of alternatives to Aristotelian cosmology. And of the classical, medieval, Byzantine and Renaissance sources discussing the doctrine, the *Timaeus* commentary, as found in Ficino's Latin Plato, is in fact, with the exception of the *Suda* mentioned below, the only one for which there is bibliographical evidence that Copernicus might have consulted it.⁵⁹ Ficino's Plotinus commentary, in which he mentions the doctrine, we can add in passing, was also known in Poland during Copernicus's lifetime.⁶⁰

If Copernicus did derive his doctrine of gravity from one or more of Ficino's discussions, some remarkable conclusions would follow. We would be able to say, in good conscience, that Ficino had supplied Copernicus and subsequently many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Copernicans—Digges, Galileo, Foscarini among them—with a physical doctrine which permitted them to insist that the heliocentric hypothesis was a true description of the cosmos and not just a mathematical device for facilitating the computation of celestial motion.⁶¹ As such it was an indispensable stepping stone towards

⁵⁸ All eight editions included Ficino's *argumenta*, commentaries and additional material; see Hankins as cited in n. 18 above. Hankins's entry for the Paris 1533 edition does not specify that it includes these materials but Ph. Renouard et al., *Imprimeurs & libraires parisiens du XVI^e siècle*, vol. 1-, Paris, 1964-, II (1969), p. 276, no. 708, confirms that its contents are the same as those of the Paris 1518 and 1522 editions, both of which do include the commentaries, *argumenta* and other material.

⁵⁹ The only other exception, a partial one, is Valla's *De expetendis*, but the account there of the doctrine is brief and does not correspond to Copernicus's version of it. The visitation of 1598 to the cathedral library at Frombork listed Valla's work among its holdings; see Hipler, *Analecta Warmiensia*, p. 60.

⁶⁰ Joannes Sommerfeld (Aesticampanus) owned the compendium of Ficino's six Plato commentaries, without the translations, published at Florence in 1496 (Hain *7076) and a copy of the 1492 edition of Ficino's translation of and commentary on Plotinus (Hain *13121). On Aesticampanus's death in 1501 both volumes became the property of one of the colleges of the Jagellonian University. See *Incunabula typographica Bibliothecae Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis*, pp. 174, 388–89; Domański, 'La fortuna di Marsilio Ficino in Polonia', pp. 569–70.

⁶¹ In this respect I think we must also qualify James Hankins's conclusion (in 'Galileo, Ficino and Renaissance Platonism') that there is a strong possibility that Galileo drew his doctrine of gravity, levity and elemental motion from Ficino. Galileo's most important, perhaps sole, source was Copernicus and Copernicus was drawing on the *Suda*, rather than Ficino or a Neoplatonic source of some kind. See further my forthcoming paper on 'Copernicus's Doctrine of Gravity, Levity and the Natural Circular Motion of the Elements'.

Newton's theory of universal gravitation. Even more significantly, perhaps, Copernicus's doctrine was the foundation of Galileo's theory of 'circular inertia'. On this concept Galileo built his new science of mechanics and quantitative motion, which, with the correction that inertial motion was rectilinear, became the foundation of pre-twentieth-century physics. If Ficino was Copernicus's source, he would, in short, have supplied one of the key doctrines in the development of modern science.

Regrettably, this is not to be. The wording of Copernicus's doctrine strongly suggests that he derived it from a quite different source, from John Philoponus's commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*, or rather from a quotation of Philoponus's account under the lemma κίνησις in the *Suda*. The introduction of this important doctrine probably derives, that is, not from the Renaissance revival of Platonic philosophy, nor, for that matter, from revisions of Aristotelian doctrine, but from the humanist revival of Greek learning. Copernicus, as a diligent student of Greek, at some point of his career looked up the word κίνησις, as any astronomer interested in Greek sources would be likely to do, in the most detailed Greek lexicon available to him. His annotations of a Greek lexicon that he owned, moreover, prove that he consulted the *Suda*, which during his lifetime was published at Milan in 1499 and Venice in 1514. Copernicus might, of course, have found the doctrine in more than one source, Ficino included.⁶² But if he did so, he evidently preferred the formula he found in the *Suda*.

Conclusion

We began with two questions. To the first we can reply with some confidence that Copernicus knew Ficino's Latin translation of Plato. He cites passages from Ficino's translation of the *Laws* and the only editions of this translation available to Copernicus before he completed the first book of *De revolutionibus* were those of the 1484, 1491, 1517, and 1518 editions of Ficino's Latin Plato. There is also good,

⁶² Ficino's *Timaeus* commentary appears in the second volume of his Latin Plato. In the Uppsala copy of Ficino's Latin Plato (see n. 28 above), the passage of his *Timaeus* commentary concerning the Platonic doctrine of gravity, levity and elemental motion on sig. ct8rb is not annotated or marked in any way.

though not conclusive, bibliographical evidence that he owned or had access to a copy of the 1484 edition. His citations of Plato might conceivably be second-hand but, given the popularity of Ficino's translation in Italy and in Poland, it is much more likely that he consulted it directly. For an astronomer in search of new ideas Plato would have been an obvious place to look, much more so than other works he certainly did consult, for example, Bessarion's *In calumniatorem Platonis*.

Now if Copernicus had access to Ficino's Latin Plato, he must also have known of Ficino's Plato commentaries, including the *Timaeus* commentary, and other matter by Ficino included in each of the four pre-1525/26 editions of the latter's Latin Plato. This consideration might encourage us to think that Ficino's cosmology, and perhaps other aspects of his philosophy, contributed to the development of Copernicus's heliocentric hypothesis. The evidence, however, does not bear out this conclusion.⁶³ There is no good reason to assume that Copernicus's celebrated invocation to the sun evokes themes specific to Neoplatonic sources or to Ficino in particular. The only exception is the reference to Hermes Trismegistus, which may derive from Ficino's translation of the *Pimander*. But even supposing that it does, its presence is insignificant. It is just one epithet of several deriving from various miscellaneous sources. If Copernicus knew Ficino's *De sole*, which he might well have done, he did not make much of it.

Nor is there any reason to think that he should have done so. Copernicus's philosophical interests, such as they were, did not focus on the sun but on the problem of explaining how the earth moved naturally. What he needed was a doctrine to replace the Aristotelian doctrine of natural place and the corollary doctrine of gravity, levity and natural elemental motion. Ficino had in fact supplied such a doctrine, one that would have fitted Copernicus's concerns perfectly. But Copernicus, if he noticed Ficino's doctrine at all, seems to have ignored it. His formula is not Ficino's; it fits instead the definition given in the *Suda*, for the details of which I refer to the article I am preparing on Copernicus's doctrine of gravity, levity and

⁶³ In his recent commentary on *De revolutionibus*, Schmeidler gives a similar assessment. He concludes that while it can be assumed that Copernicus came into contact with Neoplatonically orientated thinkers during his stay in Italy, there are no good grounds for believing that he drew any inspiration from them; see Schmeidler, *Kommentar*, p. 184.

the natural circular motion of the elements (see n. 55 above). To our second question, then, the answer must be that Copernicus learned little or nothing of importance for his heliocentric hypothesis from Ficino. Ficino's revival of Neoplatonic philosophy would have to wait for another generation—Bruno, Galileo and Kepler—before it made a decisive contribution to the development of modern science.

‘TO RAUISH AND REFINE AN EARTHLY SOULE’:
FICINO AND THE POETRY OF GEORGE CHAPMAN

Stephen Clucas

It is commonly acknowledged fact that George Chapman made extensive use of the philosophical writings of Marsilio Ficino.¹ The first acknowledgement of this debt was in 1926 when Franck L. Schoell published his *Études sur l’humanisme continental en Angleterre à la fin de la Renaissance*,² which included a chapter on Chapman’s borrowings from Ficino.³ Schoell suggests that Chapman was ‘most infatuated with Ficino’ at the moment when he was preparing his Homeric translation (i.e., in the years 1612–14) because of the Renaissance perception that the ‘divine philosopher’ (Plato) was needed to understand the ‘divine poet’ (Homer).⁴ Rather than acquiring his Platonic ideas directly from the Greek texts, Chapman made extensive use of Ficino’s Latin translation of 1484, which he read in one of the corrected and revised editions which appeared during the course of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.⁵ ‘Not only did Chapman use Ficino’, Schoell argued, ‘but he took from his prose many of his poetic images, and what is more, translated or adapted whole passages, which he inserted, almost at random, into the *Epicædium, or a*

¹ See, however, Roderick S. Wallace, ‘Chapman’s Debt to Ficino’, *Notes & Queries*, 215 (1970), pp. 402–03, which questions the real extent of Chapman’s knowledge of Ficino’s oeuvre, and qualifies some of the more enthusiastic assessments of earlier critics. I take my title from Chapman’s ‘Hymnus in Cynthiam’, the second part of *The Shadow of Night*, 1594, sig. D1r.

² Franck L. Schoell, *Études sur l’humanisme continental en Angleterre à la fin de la Renaissance*, Paris, 1926. His earlier articles included ‘George Chapman and the Italian Neo-Latinists of the Quattrocento’, *Modern Philology*, 13 (1915), pp. 215–38, and ‘George Chapman’s “Commonplace Book”’, *Modern Philology*, 17 (1919), pp. 199–218.

³ Schoell, *Études*, pp. 1–20, ‘Les emprunts de George Chapman à Marsile Ficin’.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2: ‘Tout bon helléniste que fût d’ailleurs Chapman, il semble que, comme tant d’autres de ses contemporains, il préférât lire Platon dans la traduction latine.’ (p. 2). In this essay I will be using an early seventeenth-century edition of Plato’s *Opera omnia*, Frankfurt, 1602, with Ficino’s Latin alongside the Greek, as this is likely to have been the version which Chapman was working with in the 1610s (see n. 31 below).

Funeral Song, his *Hymn to Christ upon the Cross*, and finally his *Andromeda Liberata*.⁶ Schoell demonstrated that Chapman was 'very familiar' with at least two works by Ficino: his commentary on Plato's *Ion*, *In Platonis Ionem, vel de furore poetico, ad Laurentium Medicem virum magnanimum Epitomae*, and the commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, *In Convivium Platonis de amore Commentarium*.⁷ The latter, in particular, Schoell suggests, 'exercised a singular attraction on Chapman's imagination',⁸ while the former was used extensively by Chapman in his discussion of Homer's poetic inspiration.⁹ The fact that Chapman quotes Ficino from memory, Schoell argues, is evidence of a 'great familiarity' with his texts, and although he sometimes 'confounds the original work and the commentary' ('il confond l'oeuvre originale et la commentaire'), he evidently considered Ficino (as a disciple) to have equal authority with Plato himself.¹⁰ In Schoell's view, Chapman's reliance on Ficino's philosophy indicated the need for a systematic study of 'the influence of Ficino on the great Elizabethans'.¹¹

More recently, literary studies have shifted the focus of attention away from questions of influence. In his 1989 study *The Mystification of George Chapman*, Gerald Snare noted that in early twentieth-century criticism, 'Chapman's obscurity, his intertextuality, the rapid movement of his images, his tonal harshness, his symbols and allusions . . . were [all] made to submit to the established institutional practice: influence studies, source hunting, logical analysis, philological explanation, and the ethical content of the verse.'¹² In this essay I shall be considering the theme of 'Ficino and the poetry of George Chapman' (as my subtitle suggests), but I shall not be presenting

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3: 'non seulement Chapman a pratiqué Ficin, mais il a tiré de sa prose des images pour plusieurs de ses propres poèmes, et surtout il en a traduit ou adapté des passages entiers, qu'il a insérés, un peu au hasard, dans son *Epicidium, or a Funeral Song*, dans son *Hymn to Christ upon the Cross*, et, enfin, dans son *Andromeda Liberata*'.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–6. For a more recent consideration of Chapman's use of Ficino's ideas on poetic inspiration, see Joel F. Wilcox, 'Ficino's Commentary on Plato's *Ion* and Chapman's Inspired Poet in the *Odyssey*', *Philological Quarterly*, 64 (1985), pp. 195–209.

¹⁰ Schoell, *Études*, p. 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3: 'l'influence de Ficin sur les grands élisabéthains, n'a point été systématiquement évaluée'.

¹² Gerald Snare, *The Mystification of George Chapman*, Durham, N.C., and London, 1989, p. 17.

reflections on Chapman's poetry simply as 'versified Ficino'; I shall not be considering Ficino as source, but rather as instrument or vehicle—as an appropriated discourse, as material for rhetorical invention. I do not claim to identify Chapman's sources in Ficino, but rather to consider how he used those sources. For this exercise, my primary focus will be George Chapman's epithalamion in celebration of the wedding of Robert Carr, Viscount Rochester and Earl of Somerset, and Frances Howard, *Andromeda Liberata*, published in 1614, and his *Free and Offenceless Iustification*, published later that same year as a reply to criticisms of the first poem. In both of these works Ficino's philosophical arguments are, I would argue, used as a factional apologetics—a political rhetoric. My purpose in this essay is to consider in what ways Ficino's ideas lent themselves to this kind of application.

The tendency in Renaissance criticism dealing with literary uses of Neoplatonic philosophy has been to emphasize the moral seriousness or mystical inclinations of the authors concerned, forging a simplistic and indissoluble link between a poet's materials and his beliefs. Source criticism of this kind, as Snare has argued, looks at the materials behind a poem and 'flatly resist[s] looking on it as simple material for invention'. For these critics, Snare argues, 'Neoplatonism or Orphic mysteries are . . . a serious business, an order of sacrosanct belief not to be played with', whereas the 'workmanlike poet' of the period made a 'fundamentally rhetorical' use of these beliefs.¹³ While I do not necessarily share Snare's approach, which seeks to consider each Chapman poem 'as if it were alone in its own constructed artifice',¹⁴ I do share his sense of the importance of the rhetorical constructedness of Elizabethan and Jacobean poetry, and of the important role which invention plays in this process. In his *Shadow of Night*, for example, where he glosses the lines which describe how 'heavens Geniall parts were cut away | By Saturnes hands',¹⁵ Chapman notes: 'This is expounded as followeth by Gyraldus Lillius. The application most fitly made by this author.'¹⁶ It is clear here that recovering Giraldi's mythographic doctrine would only be

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 169–70.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁵ George Chapman, *Σκια νυκτὸς*. *The Shadow of Night: containing two poeticall hymnes. Devised by G. C. Gent.*, London, 1594, sig. C2v.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, sig. E3v.

the beginning of a critical understanding of Chapman's text, which emphasizes inventive 'application' rather than simple citation or exposition, and it is the fitness of the application, rather than the 'sacrosanct belief' which should concern us. This of course bears on our ability to judge this fitness, to evaluate the consonance or aptness of the applied doctrine. It also bears on a knowledge of the occasion of this application—the rhetorical objective it was designed to achieve.

*'Offencelesse and iudicious occasions':
the celebration of the Somerset marriage*

The immediate occasion of Chapman's *Andromeda Liberata* was the marriage on 26 December 1613 of the King's favourite Robert Carr, recently created Earl of Somerset,¹⁷ and Frances Howard, erstwhile Countess of Essex, whose marriage to Robert Devereux, third Earl of Essex was controversially annulled, on the grounds of Devereux's impotence, after an ecclesiastical commission on 25 September of that same year. George Abbot, the archbishop of Canterbury, presiding over the commission, made no secret of his religious objections to the annulment and claimed widespread popular support for his views, a claim which may not have been an empty one.¹⁸ Sir John Throckmorton, in a letter to William Trumbull, for example, lamented the annulment: 'The ground I know not', he said, 'but [I] am sorry to hear it questioned. God will punish, I fear me, and that sharply, our land for these crying sins.'¹⁹ Others were scandalized by the implied sexual mores of the affair, suggesting that it was Carr and Howard's wantonness and lust which led to the annulment, and that their relationship may have begun while Devereux and Howard were still husband and wife. Evidence of these scandals abounds in anonymous manuscript poems of the period. In a Bodleian manuscript we find the following poem, for example:

Letchery did consult with witcherye
how to procure frygiditye
Upon this grounde a course was found
To frame unto a nullatye

¹⁷ Carr was created Earl of Somerset on 3 November 1613.

¹⁸ David Lindley, *The Trials of Frances Howard: Fact and Fiction at the Court of King James*, London, 1993; repr. 1996, pp. 81–84, 143.

¹⁹ Throckmorton to Trumbull, 27 May 1613, cited by Lindley, *Trials*, p. 118.

And gravitye assuming lenyete
 gave strength to this impietye
 hoping thereby a way to spye
 to rise to further dignitye
 But whats the end both foe and frend
 Cry shame on such austerite
 And book and bell do dam to Hell
 the Lord and Ladyes lecherye.²⁰

Another more pointed epigram focuses primarily on Howard's sexuality:

There was at Court a Ladye of late
 That none could enter shee was soe straight
 But now with use shee's growne so wide
 Theare is a passage for a Carre to ride.²¹

It was these contemporary rumours that triggered a succession of celebratory poems and dramatic spectacles which attempted in various ways to respond to the widespread disapproval evidenced by the scurrilous manuscript verses circulating at court and beyond. It was Chapman's task in *Andromeda Liberata*, then, to 'manage' and contain the rumour and discontent surrounding the Somerset marriage, to exculpate the happy couple, and to provide a rationale for their actions. The poem's mythological theme is a transposed version of the tribulations of the couple's courtship. Perseus (Carr) rescues Andromeda (Howard) who has been 'Bound to a barraine Rocke' (the allegedly impotent Earl of Essex) by her father Cepheus (Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk) and suffers the onslaughts of a monstrous whale (vulgar opinion). What part did Ficino's philosophy play in this task? My argument is that not only does Ficino provide Chapman with a series of arguments about the nature of reciprocal love and the ethical obligations of procreation, but also that he provides the means for celebrating what Graham Parry has called the 'numinous powers of majesty',²² and what might be called a philosophical ethics of political allegiance. Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Symposium* is used firstly to prove, in opposition to the prurient insistence of the anonymous versifiers, that the Carr-Howard

²⁰ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D 1048, fol. 64r, cited by Lindley, *Trials*, p. 118.

²¹ Bodleian Library, MS Malone 19, p. 74, cited by Lindley, *Trials*, p. 117.

²² Graham Parry, *The Golden Age Restor'd: The Culture of the Stuart Court, 1603-42*, Manchester, 1981, p. 41.

match was (a) true (and virtuous) reciprocal love and (b) a legitimate avoidance of the 'homicide' of frustrated procreation.

In lines 401–18 of the poem, Perseus, in defiance of 'The poisoned Murmures of the Multitude' (line 395), and in spite of Andromeda's pleas that he should avoid the 'Ruine', 'Fury' and 'Shame' of public rancour (lines 386–87) pledges his love for Andromeda in the name of 'Vertue' (line 398): 'He dies that loues', says Perseus, 'because his euey thought, | (Himselfe forgot) in his belou'd is wrought' (lines 401–02). The next sixteen lines follow the serpentine logic of Ficino's argument in *Oratio II*, cap. viii, which seeks to prove 'that everyone who loves is dead in himself' (*quare in se mortuus est quicumque amat*).²³ This 'Exhortation to Love', which praises the power of 'simple and mutual love', is used to redefine Carr and Howard's perceived 'letchery' as virtuous reciprocal love, and (what is more) makes their open disdain of the scandal an act of virtue in itself. Thus Chapman extends the Ficinian argument to speak directly of the Somersets' dilemma, transferring the 'death of the soul' to the 'death' in reputation threatened by vulgar rumour:

If death the Monster brought then, he had laid
A second life vp, in the loued Mayd:
And had she died, his third life Fame decreed,
Since death is conquer'd in each liuing deed.

(lines 419–22)

The posterity (or 'liuing deed') which Carr planned to 'lay up' in Howard's body would transcend the 'death' of vulgar reputation. The conceit continues with Perseus slaying the rumourous Monster by astounding it with his 'charmd sheild' (a veiled heraldic reference, no doubt, to his recently acquired earldom).²⁴ The theme of 'mutuall Loue' is repeated on the following pages, with a reference to the 'blessed death' and 'Commerce most strange' (lines 476–77) when two souls are interchanged. The 'death' is now transferred to another death, the death of the unborn infant:

²³ Ficino, *De amore*, II.8 (*Exhortatio ad amorem: De amore simplici ac de mutuo*), in *Opera omnia*, 2 vols, continuously paginated, Basel, 1576; repr. Turin, 1959 etc., p. 1327, and Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, tr. by Sears Jayne, Columbia, Mo., 1944, pp. 50, 144.

²⁴ Another possibility here is that the 'shield' represents the King's protection, especially as we are told that Carr has the image of the 'Royall Beast' in his 'armes' (180–81).

In mutuall Loue the wreake most iust is found,
 When each so kill that each cure others wound;
 But Churlish *Homicides*, must death sustaine,
 For who belou'd, not yeelding loue againe
 And so the life doth from his loue deuide
 Denies himselfe to be a *Homicide*?
 For he no lesse a *Homicide* is held,
 That man to be borne lets: then he that kild
 A man that is borne: he is bolder farre
 That present life reaues: but he crueller
 That to the to-be borne, enuies the light
 And puts their eyes out, ere they haue their sight.²⁵

(lines 485–96)

Here Chapman interleaves two Ficinian passages: the first is the argument in *Oratio II*, cap. viii, that 'a man who is loved is a homicide since he robs the loving one of his soul' (*Quis enim homicidam esse neget qui amatur cum animam ab amante seiungat?*),²⁶ but then dies in his turn. The second is the passage in the sixth Oration where Ficino argues that the man who 'begrudges the light to the infant about to be born and denies life to his still unborn children' is 'crueller' than the homicide who 'cuts short existing life'.²⁷ The purpose here is clearly to link the virtuous courtship of the Somersets to 'the life of likely Race' (line 511) which a fruitful marriage will ensure, an objective which Chapman identifies as the 'chiefe end' of Perseus's 'action' (line 512), a dynastic ambition which in the poem receives the approbation not only of Jove (the King) and 'white-armd Juno' (the Queen) but also the 'Subiect-deities' (Courtiers) who 'stoop' to kiss the 'Shaft | Golden and mutuall, with which loue comprest | Both th'enuied Louers' (lines 517–24), an image which subtly combines Ovid's golden arrow of true love with the royal sceptre. This reading of the Christmas wedding celebrations of 1613 in terms of the Pantheon of gods is followed by the apotheosis of the couple, who in the *Parcarum Epithalamion* which ends the poem, are 'rapt to heauen' to 'reigne' as 'constellations' (line 602).

²⁵ Chapman, *Andromeda Liberata*, sig. E1r–v.

²⁶ Ficino, *De amore*, II.8, in *Opera omnia*, p. 1327, and *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, tr. Jayne, pp. 51, 145.

²⁷ Ficino, *De amore*, VI.14, in *Opera omnia*, p. 1351, and *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, tr. Jayne, pp. 97, 208: 'Quippe non minus homicida censendus est, qui hominem praeripit nasciturum, quam qui natum tollit e medio. Audacior quidem qui praesentem abruptit uitam, crudelior autem, qui lucem inuidet nascituro, & nondum natos suos filios enecat.'

Ficino is also used to celebrate the quasi-divine power of Carr himself, who appears in the poem as a Neoplatonic hero or demi-god. Chapman uses Ficino's description of the god of love in the fifth Oration, as 'young, tender, flexible or rather agile, well-proportioned and handsome' (*iuvenem, tenerum, flexibilem sive agilem, apte compositum atque nitidum*),²⁸ for example, to fashion his image of Carr's androgynous beauty:

Young was he, yet not youthfull, since mid-yeeres,
The golden meane holds in mens loues and feares:
Aptly composde, and soft (or delicate)
Flexible (or tender) calme (or temperate).

(lines 255–58)

But most important to his polemical aims, perhaps, is his repeated insistence on Carr's moderate and temperate nature, his 'temperate corporature' (line 263), 'In all the humours . . . moderate' (line 266). In 1614 we know that Chapman was reading Ficino's translation of one of the Platonic *spuria*, the second of the dialogues bearing the title *Alcibiades*, in which Alcibiades and Socrates discuss the role of divine wisdom in statecraft.²⁹ In his preface to the dialogue, Ficino characterizes the nature of the soul which is prepared to receive divine wisdom. 'Who is worthy of divine wisdom?', he asks, to which he answers:

He who is prepared to receive the light. Who is prepared? He who so purges his soul first by continence, then by temperance, and lastly by devoutness (that is, by civil virtue, by purifying virtue, and the virtue of the purified soul)³⁰ that it becomes beautiful, that is to say, utterly pure and clean.³¹

²⁸ Ficino, *De amore*, V.7 (*De Amoris pictura*), in *Opera omnia*, p. 1338, and *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, tr. Jayne, pp. 72 and 175.

²⁹ He cites a passage from this work in the prefatory epistle to *A Free and Offenceless Iustification*, sig. *2r.

³⁰ These terms derive from Macrobius, *Somnium Scipionis*, I.8.

³¹ Marsilio Ficino, *Alcibiades II vel De voto*, *Marsilii Ficini argumentum*, in *Του Θειου Πλατωνος άπαντα τα σωζομενα, Divini Platonis opera omnia quae exstant Marsilio Ficino interprete*, Frankfurt, 1602, p. 451: 'Quis diuina sapientia dignus? Qui lumen eius ferre paratus est. Quis paratus? Qui per continentiam primo, deinde per temperantiam, postremo per sanctimoniam, id est ciuilem, purgatoriam purgatique uirtutem animi, sic animum expiauerit, ut pulcher, hoc est, purus omnino nitidusque euaserit.'

The purified soul passes gently through corporeal and external things so that they do not obstruct the tranquil purity of the soul (*ut tranquillam puritatem animi non impediani*). Intemperate men (*intemperati homines*), he adds, for this reason have little understanding of the truth (*minimam . . . veritatis cognitionem*), which is granted in large measure to the self-restrained. It is this portrait of the temperate man, together with Natale Conti's allegorization of Perseus in the *Mythologiae* as the power of the rational soul and prudence (*ratio animae nostrae & prudentia*) over natural desire and sensual pleasure (*naturalis libido & voluptas*),³² that Chapman uses to fashion his image of Carr as an ideal political leader, who—like reason presiding over the body and its appetites—presides over the disordered parts of the body politic (lines 119–51). In the letter of dedication, Carr's 'cleere, ingenuous and most quiet eye' is 'Exempt from passionate and duskie fumes, | That blind our Reason', recalling the 'mist' which Socrates tells Alcibiades must be 'removed from the soul' of the wise leader.³³ He is contrasted with the souls of his opponents, which are 'halfe choakt' with corporeal 'mists' (line 57), so that they are 'turned mere humorists' (line 58) overcome with 'vulgar heate and pride of splene and blood' (line 61). Chapman uses Ficino's commentary on the *Symposium* to provide a gloss on these carnal opinions 'which cannot be good' (line 62):

For as the Bodies Shadow, neuer can
Shew the distinct, and exact Forme of Man;
So nor the bodies passionate affects
Can ever teach well what the Soule respects.
For how can mortall things, immortall shew?
Or that which false is, represent the trew?

(*Ep. ded.*, lines 63–8)

³² Natale Conti, *Mythologiae, sive explicationum fabularum, libri decem. In quibus omnia prope Naturalis & Moralis Philosophiae dogmata contenta fuisse demonstratur*, Frankfurt, 1581, VII.18, 'De Perseo', pp. 816–17: 'quod Perseus illa egerit, quae de ipso superius dicta sunt, id totum fabulosum: est enim Perseus ratio animae nostrae & prudentia. Atqui Medusa cum esset vel meretrix, vel naturalis libido & voluptas, quae homines in saxa conuerteret: haec caeditur a Perseo, & caput eius Palladi datur, quod affigitur clypeo. Nihil hoc aliud significat, quam vim eandem esse sapientiae & libidinis, neque minus esse voluptatis in rebus praeclaris, quam in libidine: sed ad hanc cognitionem tanquam lena utimur ratione, quare Perseus ablatum Medusae caput illud Palladi asportauit.'

³³ Plato, *Opera*, p. 459: 'quemadmodum Diomedes Mineruam inquit Homerus ab oculis nebulam abstulisse, ut discerneret Deum ab homine, sic & ab animo tuo prius oportere caliginem, qua nunc offunditur, auferre: deinde illa propius admouere, per quae seu bonum quid sit siue malum dignoscas.'

This adaptation of Ficino's chapter of *De amore* in which he discusses the inadequation of material forms to the 'ideas, concepts and seeds' (*ideae, rationes, et semina*) of the 'true nature of the divine' (*divinorum naturam propriam*),³⁴ transposes metaphysical reflections into the political sphere. The 'mortal things' are the false opinions of Carr's opponents, while the 'immortal things' represent the 'trew' opinions of Carr and his faction. In the following passage Chapman develops this point—the 'meerly Animate man' he says 'doth nothing see | That tends to heauen' (lines 79–80).

... It must be onely He
 That is mere soule: her separable powers
 The scepter giuing heere: That then discourse
 Of motions that in sence doe neuer fall . . .
 . . . [so that] our earthly parts
 Sincke all to earth: And then the ingenuous arts
 Doe their true office, Then true Policie
 Windes like a serpent, through all Empery,
 Her folds on both sides bounded, like a flood
 With high shores listed, making great and good
 Whom she instructeth, to which, you (my Lord)
 May lay all claimes that Temper can afford.

(*Ep. ded.*, lines 80–92)

This echoes Socrates's doctrine in *Alcibiades II*, where he says that 'the state or soul that is to live aright' (*ciuitatem & animam, quae recte victura sit*) needs divine wisdom, or 'knowledge of the highest good' (*scientia optimi*) in order to make the 'sciences as a whole' (which Chapman calls 'the ingenuous arts') function in accordance with

³⁴ Ficino, *De amore*, II.4, in *Opera omnia*, p. 1325, and *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, tr. Jayne, pp. 47, 139–40. Cf. esp. 'Plato speaks of the shapes of bodies as related to the soul, as though next of kin, for the shapes of bodies are ranked in the next level after the soul. "Of these things none is adequate." Forms of this kind are neither sufficiently divine things, nor adequately represent them to us, for the true things are the Ideas, Concepts, and Seeds, whereas the Forms of bodies seem to be the shadows of things rather than the true things themselves. In fact, just as the shadow of a body does not give a clear and exact image of the body, so the bodies themselves do not represent the true nature of the divine' ('Vocat autem formas corporum animae cognatas, quasi proxime natas. Sequenti enim gradu post animam formae corporum disponuntur. Quorum nihil sufficienter se habet. Formae huiusmodi neque sufficienter sunt, neque sufficienter nobis diuina ostendunt. Verae nanque res, ideae, rationes, & semina sunt: Corporum vero formae, umbrae rerum potius quam uerae res esse uidentur. Quemadmodum uero corporis umbra exactam atque distinctam corporis figuram non indicat, ita corpora diuinorum naturam propriam non demonstrant.')

divine principles.³⁵ Platonic wisdom and 'true Policie' thus become identical. As *vir temperans*, Carr is both theologically and politically 'pure'.

This philosophical ethics of policy plays an important role in Chapman's defence of the Somersets against court scandal. One of the central themes of Chapman's *Andromeda Liberata*, as the quotation from Petrarch's *De remediis utriusque fortunae* on the title-page announces, is the ignorance of vulgar opinion: 'Nothing is further from truth or virtue', it reads, 'than vulgar opinion' (*Nihil a veritate nec virtute remotius quam vulgaris opinio*).³⁶ The passage preceding this quotation reads 'In their own way the common people have learned to call lunatics wise men and wise men lunatics, which indicates that they take falsehood for truth and truth for falsehood'.³⁷ *Alcibiades II* also addresses the political dynamics of opinion. The state which allows itself to be driven by 'mindless opinion' (*opinionem sine mente*), Socrates suggests, is a 'state full of the utmost turmoil and injustice' (*republicam tumultus quamplurimi iniquitatisque plenissimam*).³⁸ It seems clear that Chapman had been gathering together materials from various sources dealing with the evils of popular ignorance in order to compose his epithalamium; that is, he was engaged in the kind of 'political reading' which Jardine and Grafton have characterized as 'public performance' rather than 'private meditation', a 'goal-orientated . . . active, rather than a passive pursuit' in which a 'professional reader' would undertake a 'close and informed reading, with a diplomatic or political end in mind'.³⁹

Chapman's poem represents Carr's 'meerely Animate' opponents as benighted, perturbed and carnal souls—the embodiment of human debility as it was seen in Neoplatonic, Stoic and Christian terms.

³⁵ Plato, *Opera*, p. 457.

³⁶ Francesco Petrarca, *De remediis utriusque fortunae*, I.12, 18. I am grateful to Dr Max Grosse of the University of Tübingen for this reference. On Chapman's use of Petrarch, see Franck L. Schoell, 'Une source nouvelle de Chapman: Francisci Petrarcae *De Contemptu mundi colloquiorum liber, quem Secretum suum inscripsit*', *Revue germanique*, 9 (1913), pp. 428–33.

³⁷ Petrarca, *De remediis utriusque fortunae*: 'Vulgus insanos sapientes dicere et sapientes insanos iure suo didicit, quod est ut falsa pro veris veraque pro falsis habeat.' The translation is from Conrad H. Rawski, *Petrarch's Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul. A Modern English Translation of De remediis utriusque Fortunae, with a commentary*, 5 vols, Bloomington, Ind., and Indianapolis, 1991, I, p. 34.

³⁸ Plato, *Opera*, p. 456.

³⁹ Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, 'Studied for Action: How Gabriel Harvey Read his Livy', *Past and Present*, 129 (1990), pp. 30–78 (pp. 30–31, 34, 44).

Chapman opens his verse epistle to the Somersets with a profoundly anti-demotic gesture:

As nothing vnder heauen is more remou'd
 From Truth and virtue, then *Opinions* prou'd
 By vulgar *Voices*: So is nought more true
 Nor soundly virtuous then things held by few.

(*Ep. ded.*, lines 1–4)

Conflating Neoplatonic divine wisdom and aristocratic anti-plebeian prejudice, Chapman fashions an apology which seeks to marginalize the discomforts of contemporary disapproval, reserving the moral high-ground for the Somersets and their allies. Only those who are rational and truly spiritual will be able to appreciate Carr's virtues, the poem suggests, and those who oppose the marriage are disordered, impious and blinded by corporeal 'mists'. The particular target of Chapman's diatribes appears to be the religious opponents of the match, and particularly the archbishop of Canterbury, who claimed to speak for his countrymen at large. This is signalled in the text of the dedicatory epistle by Chapman's many references to false and hypocritical Puritan piety:

... the one-ear'd Race
 Of set-eyd vulgars, that will no waie see
 But that their stiffe necks driue them headlongy,
 Stung with the Gadflie of misgouernd zeale.

(*Ep. ded.*, lines 16–19)

This 'factious brood' (*Ep.* line 161) that seeks to 'sting' the honour of Carr's bride with their 'forked tongues' (*Ep.* line 162) are 'the hottest sweaters of religion' (*Andromeda* line 8), 'seditious', 'vngodly' and 'prophane' (*Andr.* lines 1–4) who use the guise of religious purity 'To warrant Innouation' (*Andr.* line 180) and foment social unrest. Figured as the monstrous whale, and (more traditionally) as 'A thousand bodie vnder one sole head' (line 168), these 'spic't conscienc't men' (line 201) are vanquished by Perseus, who is both Neoplatonic hero, and a mythological representation of factional victory. In Chapman's hands, then, at least in *Andromeda Liberata*, Ficinian Neoplatonism is less a hierophantic or spiritual language than a political discourse. In Chapman's poem, it is the 'poore of vnderstanding' who cannot grasp Carr's 'half-divine' nature; and political allegiance and Neoplatonic wisdom become inextricably linked.

*'Lately published and most maliciously interpreted':
allegorical fictions and partial reading*

Ficino comes to Chapman's aid once again in the altogether more delicate situation surrounding the publication of his *Free and Offenceles Iustification: Of a lately published and most maliciously misinterpreted Poeme; Entitled Andromeda Liberata*. As its title suggests, Chapman's first poem, far from quelling the public outcry surrounding the Somerset marriage, actually exacerbated it. The two most controversial aspects are resumed and answered in a poetic dialogue between PHEME (or Rumour) and THEODINES (the divinely inspired poet, i.e. Chapman). Somerset, according to PHEME, is angry with Chapman's work:

Your *Perseus* is displeas'd, and sleighteth now
Your worke, as idle, and as seruile, yow.
The peoples god-voice, hath exclamd away
Your mistie cloudes, and he sees cleere as day
Y'aue made him scandald for anothers wrong,
Wishing vnpublisht your vnpopular song.

(lines 5–10)

The scandal it seems was caused by two passages in the poem. The first is the homicide conceit. 'But who are those you reckon *Homicides* | in your rackt Poeme?', PHEME asks, 'I sweare, that diuides | Your wondering Reader, far from your applause' (lines 97–99). Chapman responds by reiterating his point about the Somersets' right to 'propagate their liues into descent | Needefull and lawfull' (lines 109–10). The homicides, he says, are those who 'will denie' this 'possibility' (lines 107–08) by opposing the match. Besides, he continues, 'that argument | Is *Platoes*, to a word, which much commends | The two great personages, who wanting th'ends | Of wedlocke as they were; with one consent | Sought cleere disiunction' (lines 110–14). At this point in the margin, he directs his reader to 'See my reasons in their places', but also provides a supporting quotation, which (with minor differences) is the borrowed quotation from Ficino's *De amore*. The argument then is *Ficino's* 'to a word', rather than *Plato's*. Chapman's use of Ficino has two distinct purposes: firstly it 'commends | The two great personages', it has panegyric and apologetic force, but also it has the benefit of being somebody else's 'argument' which may (if and when necessary) be disowned, even though the application (the 'reasons') are Chapman's own. *Plato dixit*. Chapman's

immediate objective (and one he reiterates now) is to overcome the 'bans and poisons' which 'ouerflow' his clients—to reclaim control of their representation on their behalf.

The second problem addressed by the apology concerns his reference to Andromeda as 'Bound to a barraine rocke' (line 143). Pheme openly scoffs at Theodines for his brutal dissection of the annulment: 'That (barraine) clear your edge of if you can' (line 125). Chapman has an uphill task here as he has clearly added the adjective to the phrase which he borrowed from Conti (the original says simply *Andromedam . . . saxo alligatam*),⁴⁰ and given the intense discussions which surrounded the impotence issue, including, for example, whether or not Devereux ought to submit to a physical examination by physicians, it is unlikely that anybody could have failed to notice this epithet. Essex clearly didn't, and this no doubt explains Carr's displeasure, because as the patron, he, and not Chapman, would have borne the brunt of Essex's discontent. Chapman, rather unconvincingly, argues that no personal reference to Essex was intended, and suggests, if anything, that it was Howard's fertility which was at issue:

As if that could applied be to a Man?
O barraine Malice! was it euer sayd
A man was barraine? or the burthen layd
Of bearing fruite on Man? if not, nor this
Epithete barraine, can be construed his
In least proprietic.

(lines 122–27)

The argument then shifts uneasily into praise of the virgin Andromeda's 'beauties' glossed with a quote from Conti (*Virgo sane egregia & omnibus animi & corporis dotibus ornatissima*), before coming to an abrupt end with a quote from Catullus 'O saeculum insipiens & infacetum' ('What a stupid and witless generation!', *Carm.* 43.8). Chapman's problem, of course, was that malice, far from being 'barraine', was actually rather fecund, 'Euer deliuered, euermore with childe' (line 12), as he says earlier in the dialogue. He is also only too aware that it is not *Andromeda Liberata* which the scandal-mongers are attacking, but its patron:

⁴⁰ Conti, *Mythologiae*, VIII.6, 'De Nereo & Nereidibus', p. 847.

His own allegory, he claims, was innocent, 'harmelesly and gracefully applicable to the occasion' (sig. *3r) and was aimed only at 'the sauage multitude; peruerting her most lawfully-sought propagation, both of blood and blessing, to their owne most lawlesse and lasciuious intentions: from which in all right she was legally and formally deliuered'. His allegory, he insists, had not 'the least intendment . . . against any noble personages free state, or honour'. He has been ensnared he says, by the 'malicious reader', who by 'straining the Allegorie past his intentionall limits' has made it 'giue blood'. The 'base, ignoble, barbarous, giddie multitude' have taken his poem and:

setting my song to their owne tunes, haue made it yeeld so harsh and distastefull a sound to my best friends, that my Integritie, euen they hold, affected with the shrill eccho thereof, by reflexion; receiuing it from the mouthes of others.

(sig. *4r-v)

Ironically, then, a poem against the misrepresentations of scandal-mongers has been misrepresented, and the 'licence' and 'Ambiguity' of allegory has—by being 'maliciously misinterpreted'—become another weapon to turn against his patron.

Chapman's complaints here are, of course, themselves rhetorical. Doubtless he knew the stakes involved in writing apologetic verse of this kind. Chapman had merely fallen victim to the perennial hazard of factional writing: factional reading. If Somerset was angry with Chapman, it was for his failure to foresee the potential for misconstrual within the poem, and the offence which it was likely to generate. Chapman in his allegory was pursuing what Annabel Patterson has called the 'strategies of indirection' used by Jacobean writers to avoid censorship, that is, 'a highly sophisticated system of oblique communication . . . whereby writers could communicate with readers or audiences . . . without producing a direct confrontation'.⁴³

quod universa philosophiae praecepta sub his ipsis fabulis antiquitus continebantur: quippe cum non ita multis annis ante Aristotelis, & Platonis, & caeterorum philosophorum tempora, omnia philosophiae dogmata non aperte, sed obscure sub quibusdam integumentis traderentur . . . Qui vero altissima & occultissima fabularum secreta denudaverit, qui philosophiae dogmata ex obscuris fabularum tenebris in lucem eduxerit, aut ad vires actionesque naturae patefaciendas pertinentia, aut ad mores informandos, vitamque recte instituendam, aut ad vires motusque astrorum intelligendos, adhuc repertus est nemo . . . tolerabilis.⁷

⁴³ Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Authority: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England*, Madison, Wis., 1984, p. 45.

Allegory, translation and imitation were ways of avoiding direct responsibility for such communications. However, as Patterson has pointed out, Jacobean readers, whilst embracing the idea of interpretative indeterminacy, also pragmatically recognized that 'behind each text stood an author, whose intentions it was the reader's responsibility to discern',⁴⁴ and this responsibility was more weighty where the issues at stake were ideological or factional. Chapman believes (or claims to believe) that in Neoplatonic allegories (such as his application of Ficino's doctrines on the 'homicide' of frustrated procreation, or Andromeda chained to her 'barraine rocke') the obscurity of the meaning would allow him to be 'master' of his 'owne meaning', whereas his meaning simply becomes fodder for the 'enuious . . . Reader' who brings his own prejudices and opinions to the text. This is always a danger when meanings which are supposedly reserved for a private élite (in this case, those with allegiance to Somerset) are brought into the public domain.

'Un courtisan malhabile': Chapman as inept courtly poet

Earlier critics of Chapman tended to confuse aesthetic and political issues. Both Franck Schoell, and Jean Jacquot, whose works were vital to later studies of Chapman's poetry, depicted Chapman as an inept courtly poet ill-equipped to handle the delicate subjects which he chose to address, and were in any case frankly disapproving of the politically committed nature of his poetry. Schoell evidently disapproved of the polemical nature of Chapman's poem, and in a remark which demonstrates a profound misunderstanding of the nature of Jacobean courtly poetry, criticizes *Andromeda* for being 'more a pamphlet than an epithalamium'.⁴⁵ 'The poem is plainly conceived as a defence of the Earl of Somerset and Lady Frances', he says, 'about whom many unfavourable rumours had been circulating questioning the morality of the marriage and suspecting intrigues and intimacy prior to the marriage'.⁴⁶ Having established the poem's ulterior motives, he goes on to emphasize the maladroit and inept nature of Chapman's occasional poem: 'It is difficult to conceive of an

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

⁴⁵ Schoell, *Études*, p. 13: 'son poème . . . est presque plus pamphlet qu'épithalame'.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

epithalamium more devoid of grace and lightness of touch', he says, 'than the one which Chapman wrote for his current protector.'⁴⁷ Schoell particularly comments on the inappropriateness of representing Howard (vilified as a 'whore' by many of her opponents) as the 'matchless virgin' Andromeda.⁴⁸

Schoell accused Chapman both of stylistic clumsiness and political insensitivity. He is scathing, for example, regarding what he calls Chapman's 'childish paradoxes' (*paradoxes enfantins*), in lines 251–344 of *Andromeda*, most of which (as he himself notes) consisted of 'an almost literal translation' of Ficino's commentary on the *Symposium*.⁴⁹ While he was prepared to concede that Chapman's poem was not stylistically anomalous, and that there might be 'something to be appreciated by lovers of subtlety and paradox' in Chapman's style, he does argue that, even by contemporary generic lights, his poem was obscure and incomprehensible:

But we must remember that even in the England of 1614, where readers were trained in these kinds of [verbal] gymnastics, certain passages were either incomprehensible or misunderstood, and Somerset himself was annoyed and expressed his anger to Chapman.

Schoell gives rather curious reasons for Somerset's annoyance with the poem:

He had, for one thing, misconstrued the words of line 143 where Andromeda is described as being 'bound to a barren rock', taking himself to be the 'barren rock', which was evidently a little unflattering for his virility. For another, he had taken offence at the passage on homicides and he certainly saw in it an allusion to the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury, which he was accused of being involved in. Naturally he didn't have an untroubled conscience, and it was supremely maladroit of Chapman (so desirous was he to save himself the effort of original invention by borrowing scraps from Ficino) to speak of homicide to a man who had a murder on his conscience.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid., 'Il est difficile de concevoir un épithalame plus dépourvu de grâce légère que celui que Chapman écrivit pour son protecteur d'alors.'

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 17: 'Il y a évidemment dans cette dialectique de quoi surprendre les esprits les plus épris de subtilité et de paradoxe. Il faut croire que même dans l'Angleterre de 1614, plus entraînée à cette sorte de gymnastique, certains passages ne furent pas, ou furent mal saisis, car Somerset lui-même se fâcha et signifia sa colère à Chapman. Il avait, d'une part, mal compris les mots du vers 143 où Andromède est décrite comme "bound to a barren rock", et s'était pris lui-même pour le "barren rock" (ce qui était évidemment peu flatteur pour sa virilité). D'autre

Given the clear identification of Somerset and Perseus, it is extremely unlikely that he would have read himself as the 'barren rock' in question. As to the purported sensitivity to the allusion to the murder of Overbury, this is hardly an issue about which Chapman could have had any knowledge. Overbury was imprisoned in the Tower after making accusations against Somerset on 21 April 1613, and died in mysterious circumstances on 15 September 1613. Rumours concerning the cause of his death, however, did not begin until the summer of 1615, and Somerset and his wife were not detained until 13 October 1615.⁵¹ Chapman could hardly be seen as 'maladroit' for his choice of the Ficinian motif—which (as we have seen) made perfect sense in the rhetorical context of the piece—when he clearly had no knowledge of the Overbury affair at the time the poem was published.

Chapman deserved his unpleasant 'lesson' in misfired compliment, Schoell argues, and the humiliating necessity of publishing his *Justification* (which Schoell characterizes as an 'argument between protector and protected', *brouille entre protecteur et protégé*),⁵² because of his selection of 'badly chosen and badly compiled passages taken from someone else's prose'.⁵³ The inference here that Chapman had plagiarized Ficino ('la prose d'autrui') in his poetry is made explicit in a footnote, where he points out that Chapman nowhere mentions the name of Ficino in his work, either in the text or in the gloss.⁵⁴ In short, Schoell accuses Chapman of crude imitation: 'Chapman seems usually to have poorly digested the Latin texts in poetry or prose which he translated, and then incorporated them into his drama and poetry.'⁵⁵ This supposed stylistic crudity, which Schoell suspects was

part, il s'est offensé du passage sur les homicides et y a certainement vu une allusion au meurtre de Sir Thomas Overbury, dans lequel il ne fut accusé d'avoir trempé que plus d'un an après. Il n'avait naturellement pas la conscience tranquille. Et il était suprêmement maladroit de la part de Chapman (si désireux qu'il fût de s'épargner les affres de l'invention originale en empruntant des morceaux à Ficin) de parler homicide à un homme qui avait un meurtre sur la conscience.'

⁵¹ Lindley, *Trials*, pp. 145–47.

⁵² Schoell, *Études*, p. 18.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 19: 'il avait mérité cette leçon, car il avait vraiment abusé du droit de versifier et de publier sous sa signature des passages mal choisis et mal assemblés de la prose d'autrui'.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14, n. 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9: 'Chapman paraît avoir à son ordinaire assez mal digéré les textes latins en prose ou en vers qu'il traduisait, puis incorporait à ses drames ou à ses poèmes'.

caused by a slavish devotion to the commonplace method,⁵⁶ seems to mirror Chapman's supposed courtly clumsiness: he is both politically and poetically inept.

In his study *George Chapman (1559–1634)*, Jean Jacquot, like Schoell, saw Chapman's *Andromeda Liberata* as an inept courtly performance.⁵⁷ 'He plied his courtly trade with a singular lack of skill', says Jacquot:

Instead of passing over the events which had made Somerset unpopular in silence, he attacked those who had slandered his patron in a bellicose preface . . . In a long epistle, he consoles the bride and groom for the common people's dislike of them, arguing that virtue finds recompense in itself. Then he launches a diatribe against the hypocrites who, feigning religious zeal, are opposed to the marriage.⁵⁸

Chapman was, Jacquot suggests, 'a clumsy courtier' (*un courtisan malhabile*),⁵⁹ a clownish character, whose impulsive actions and obstinacy, 'often compromised the situation which he sought to make secure'.⁶⁰ Jacquot, like Schoell, suggests that Chapman's poem is both aesthetically and politically ill-judged and clumsy. 'The bear's cobblestone', proverbially a well-intentioned but clumsy gesture,⁶¹ 'would have been a lighter projectile than this poem,' says Jacquot, and Chapman's attempts to extricate himself from the web of allusions which he had created was patently unsuccessful:

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁷ Jean Jacquot, *George Chapman (1559–1634): sa vie, sa poésie, son théâtre, sa pensée*, Paris, 1951; see esp. ch. 7, 'Le Platonisme de Chapman', pp. 199–254.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51: 'il fit son métier de courtisan avec une insigne maladresse. Au lieu de passer sous silence les événements qui avaient achevé de rendre Somerset impopulaire, il s'attaque, dans une préface belliqueuse, à ceux qui avaient calomnié le favori. Il n'ignore pas qu'en prenant son parti il se fera des ennemis, mais celui-ci le protégera. Dans une longue épître, il console les époux de la haine du vulgaire, leur montrant que la vertu trouve en elle-même sa récompense. Puis il se lance dans une diatribe contre les hypocrites qui, feignant le zèle religieux, se sont opposés à ce mariage.' In n. 43 Jacquot particularly singles out Archbishop George Abbot as one of the targets of this attack.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58: 'ses mouvements impulsifs, ses entêtements, viennent souvent compromettre la situation qu'il cherche à s'assurer. Les épisodes d'une carrière dramatique mouvementée nous le font voir avec des faiblesses qui sont celles de la commune humanité, il y a un élément de comédie dans sa vie comme dans son oeuvre.'

⁶¹ See *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, II, p. 310: '*Le pavé de l'ours*—Acte, geste bien intentionné mais lourd et maladroit, par allusion à la Fable de La Fontaine, *C'est le pavé de l'ours*.'

Chapman published a *Justification* (1614) to defend himself but this only made matters worse. His mythological poem, he said, contained no personal allusions. It simply argued for a virgin's right to be with someone she loved and to have children. It was true that he had spoken of a 'barren rock' and had accused anyone who does not fulfil the task of procreation of being a homicide. But was this a reason to suggest that he had intended to taint the honour of a nobleman? He energetically denied the rumours according to which his poem had earned him a beating . . . His friends, he says, have abandoned him, he is reproached for his servility; but what does it matter? because to him Perseus is worth it all. The patron was doubtless unhappy with Chapman's efforts to please him, but he did not harbour a grudge for long.⁶²

As Jacquot implies here, if Somerset was irritated by the *succès de scandale*, it was by no means terminal for their patron-client relationship, and Somerset was not so insulted that he would refuse to be the conspicuous dedicatee of Chapman's Homeric translations, part of which was presented to Carr as a New Year's gift in January 1614/15. Jacquot's conclusion about what he calls the '*Andromeda* episode' betrays a conservative assessment of the relationship between letters and political affairs in the Jacobean period:

The *Andromeda* episode, shows us where Chapman could allow himself to be led by his system of personal justification, and his own unique logic. Thus he describes the biggest parasite of the realm in the terms used to describe a sage who had attained the supreme degree of perfection.⁶³

⁶² Jacquot, *Chapman*, p. 52: 'Le pavé de l'ours était un bien léger projectile auprès de ce poème qui fit scandale. Chapman publia pour se défendre une *Justification* (1614) qui ne fit qu'aggraver son cas. Son poème mythologique, dit-il, ne renferme aucune allusion personnelle. Il a simplement revendiqué pour une vierge innocente le droit d'appartenir à celui qu'elle aime et d'en avoir des enfants. Sans doute il a parlé d'un rocher stérile et a accusé d'homicide celui qui ne remplit pas sa tâche de procréateur. Mais est-ce une raison pour lui attribuer l'intention d'attenter à l'honneur de quelque grand personnage? Il dément énergiquement les rumeurs selon lesquelles son poème lui aurait valu des coups. Mais si Essex l'avait fait bâtonner par ses gens, cela n'aurait rien de surprenant. Ses amis, conclut-il, l'abandonnent, lui reprochant sa servilité; mais qu'importe? puisque Persée à lui seul les vaut tous. Le favori fut sans doute mécontent des efforts de Chapman pour lui plaire, mais il ne lui garda pas longtemps rancune.'

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 52: 'L'épisode d'*Andromède* nous montre jusque'ouù Chapman pouvait se laisser entraîner par son système de justification personnelle et sa logique toute spéciale. C'est ainsi qu'il décrit le plus grand parasite du royaume sous les traits d'un sage parvenu au suprême degré de la perfection.'

This kind of open disapproval of the panegyric forms of Jacobean literature has only in recent years been critically reassessed, and as late as 1987, McClung and Simard still felt it necessary to argue against 'contemporary evaluations of . . . artifacts of the patronage system', which they felt 'suffer from arbitrary and synchronic judgements about power relationships'.⁶⁴ It is not historically constructive to condemn Chapman as a seventeenth-century spin-doctor, cravenly gilding the sickly lily of a Jacobean 'parasite'. If Jacobean court literature is marked by 'shared assumptions on the part of poet and patron' and is 'governed by the encoding of . . . [a] rhetoric of service',⁶⁵ it is the mechanisms of this encoding which should be the focus of attention, rather than the relatively trivial problems which the patronage system poses for contemporary aesthetic judgements or political ethics. While Jacquot scoffs at Chapman's representation of 'parasite' as 'sage', it is precisely this kind of cultural encoding of ideological and factional positions which is most profitable for literary historians to study and assess. Whilst accusing Chapman of crudeness and ineptitude, both Schoell and Jacquot displayed their inability to appreciate the nature of rhetorical invention and of courtly literary production in the Jacobean period.

'The right laid line of truth': Anamorphosis and Allegiance

The precariousness and the internal dynamics of factional literary production can best be illuminated by a motif from Chapman's works themselves. Asall, a character in Chapman's *Tragedy of Chabot*, which Norma Solve has argued also concerns the political situation of the Earl of Somerset,⁶⁶ reflects upon the nature of opinion and reputation using an optical metaphor, that of the anamorphic portrait:

⁶⁴ William McClung and Rodney Simard, 'Donne's Somerset Epithalamion and the Erotics of Criticism', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 50 (1987), pp. 95-106, esp. p. 102. See also Heather Dubrow, 'The Sun in Water: Donne's Somerset Epithalamium and the Poetics of Patronage', in *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays on Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture*, ed. by Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier, Chicago and London, 1988, pp. 197-219.

⁶⁵ McClung and Simard, 'Donne's Somerset Epithalamion', p. 102.

⁶⁶ Norma Dobie Solve, *Stuart Politics in Chapman's 'Tragedy of Chabot'*, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1928.

As of a Picture wrought to opticke reason
 That to all passers by, seemes as they move
 Now woman, now a Monster, now a Divell,
 And till you stand, and in a right line view it,
 You cannot well judge what the maine forme is,
 So men that view him but in vulgar passes,
 Casting but laterall, or partiall glances
 At what he is, suppose him weake, unjust,
 Bloody and monstrous, but stand free and fast,
 And judge him by no more than what you know
 Ingenuously; and by the right laid line
 Of truth, he truely, with all stiles deserve
 Of wise, just, good, a man both soule and nerve.⁶⁷

Not only does this recall Niobe's statue in Chapman's *Ouids Banquet of Sence*, which was

So cunningly to optick reason wrought,
 That a farre of it shewd a womans face,
 Heaueie, and weeping; but more neerly viewed,
 Nor weeping, heauy, nor a woman shewed⁶⁸

But also the device adorning the title page of *Andromeda Liberata*, which shows a stick, immersed in water by a cloud-borne hand, distorted by refraction, with the motto 'Aware of what is right (or straight)' (*Mihi conscia recti*). As David Lindley has noted, Chapman 'anticipates modern critics in making the anamorphic portrait a symbol of the precariousness of interpretation, but unlike them still wishes to retain the possibility that there is a right way of looking, one position from which the true character of the person may be understood.'⁶⁹ For Jacques Lacan, anamorphosis (in its 'inversion' of the rules of perspective, and of the 'geometral point' which for him represents the position of the Cartesian ego) is the annihilation of the subject.⁷⁰ But as Jurgis Baltrusaitis explains in his book *Anamorphoses*,

⁶⁷ George Chapman, *The Tragedy of Chabot*, I, i, 68–80, cited by Lindley, *Trials*, p. 143.

⁶⁸ George Chapman, *Ouids Banquet of Sence. A Coronet for his Mistresse Philosophie, and his Amorous Zodiacke*, London, 1595, sig. B1v. For a reading of Niobe's statue as 'inspired interpretation', see Louise Vinge, 'Chapman's *Ouids Banquet of Sence*: Its Sources and Theme', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 38 (1975), pp. 234–57, esp. pp. 235–36.

⁶⁹ Lindley, *Trials*, p. 143.

⁷⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, tr. by Alan Sheridan, Harmondsworth, 1979, pp. 85–89.

while anamorphic distortion is a 'reversal' of the principles of perspective in so far as they are 'a projection of forms beyond their limits', this dislocation is only temporary and the essential point is that 'they rectify themselves when they are viewed from a determinate point'.⁷¹ For Chapman the anamorphosis of opinion seems rather to be the determination of subjectivity—and particularly the determination of a political subjectivity. The 'right way of looking' is allegiance (in this case, to the Earl of Somerset), and allegiance to the Earl of Somerset is wisdom itself. The ordering function of anamorphosis, and one which is encoded in terms of rank and social status, is described in the following terms by Jean François Nicéron in 1638: 'by using these rules . . . deformed and confused figures which represent nothing that is well-ordered . . . and seem to require nothing but a country talent, will be able to be seen as perfect images and well-ordered pictures.'⁷² For Chapman the Neoplatonism of Marsilio Ficino played a similar role: its figures of mutual and reciprocal love and duty, and its philosophical ideals of statesmanship provided an 'optic' by which the deformed and confused figures of contemporary political rivalries could be rectified and resolved into a perfect image of political order.

⁷¹ Jurgis Baltrusaitis, *Anamorphoses ou magie artificielle des effets merveilleux*, Paris, 1969, 'Avant-propos', p. 5: 'L'anamorphose . . . c'est une projection des formes hors d'elles-mêmes et leur dislocation de manière qu'elles sont vues d'un point déterminé.'

⁷² Jean François Nicéron, *La Perspective curieuse ou magie artificielle*, Paris, 1638, p. 70: 'pourront-ils faire par l'usage de ces regles . . . des figures difformes & confuses, qui ne représenteront rien de bien ordonné . . . qui semblent ne demander rien que de rustique, on sera veoir des images parfaites & tableaux bien ordonnez'.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1-9

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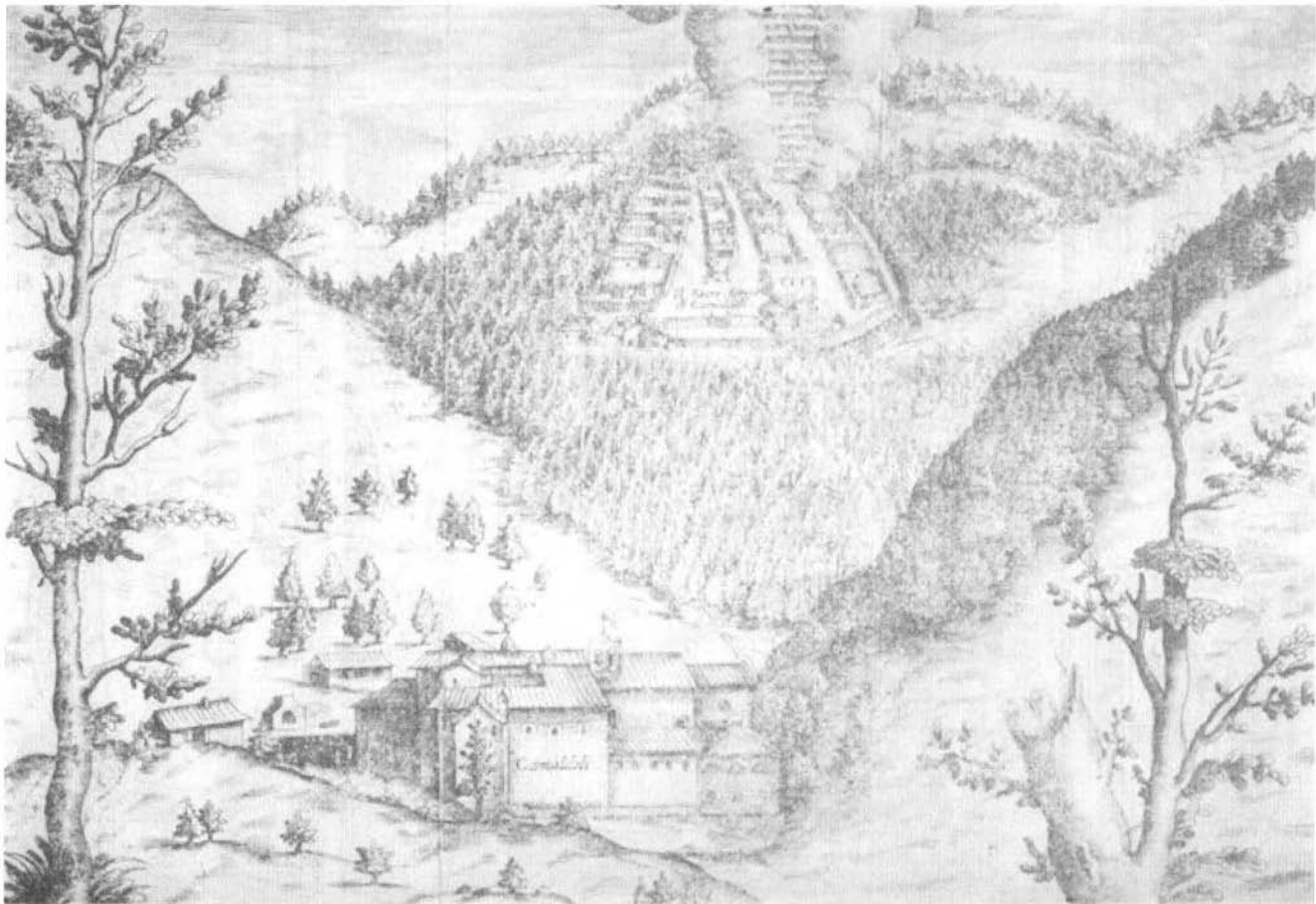


Figure 1 (Lackner). Camaldoli (from a sixteenth-century print). Monastery of Fontebuono and Sacro Eremo with ladder ascending to heaven.



Figure 2. (Lackner). Sacro Eremo di Camaldoli, from Agostino Fortunio, *Historiarum Camaldulensium libri tres* (Florence, 1575).

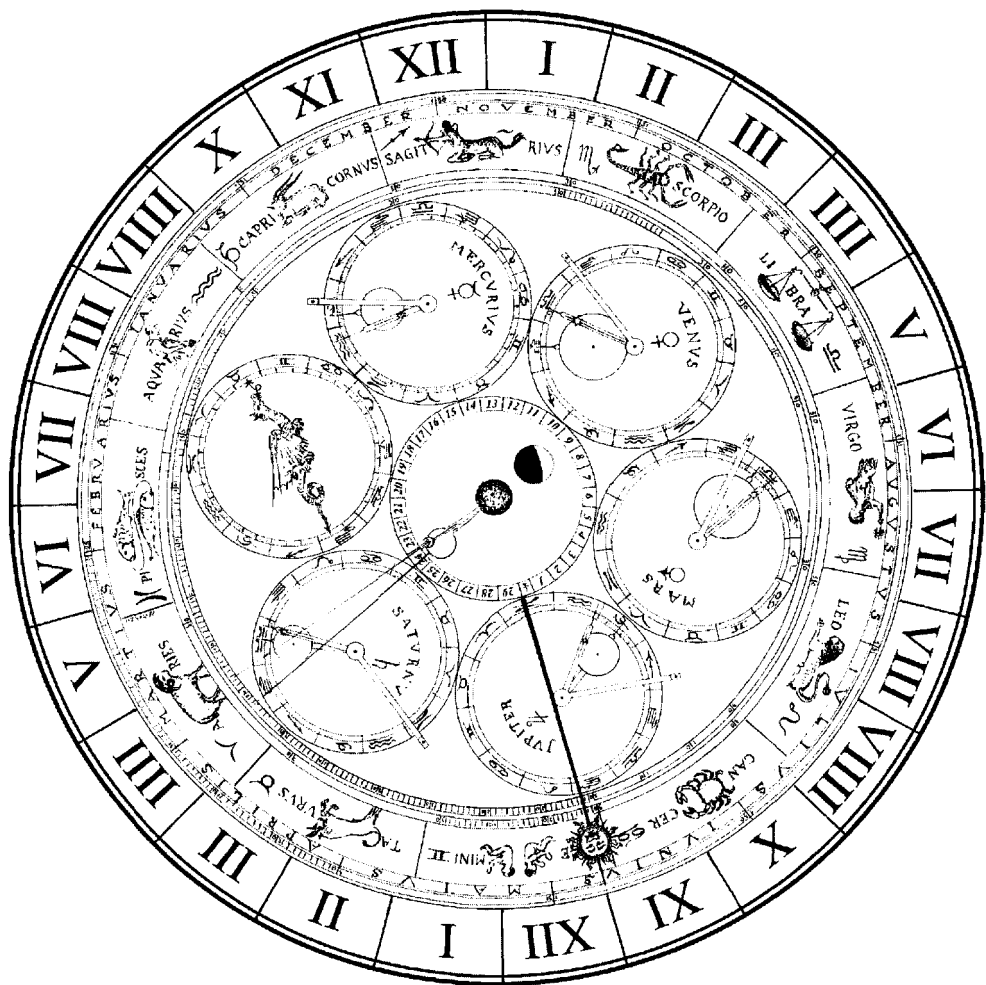


Figure 3. ((Toussaint). Proposed sketch for the dial of Lorenzo della Volpaia's clock matching Poliziano's description. Courtesy of Museo di Storia della Scienza di Firenze, Dottressa F. Principe.



Figure 4. (Ames-Lewis). Poggio a Caiano, Villa Medici, portico frieze, detail: the 'Chariot of the Soul'. Photo: Soprintendenza B.A.A., Florence.

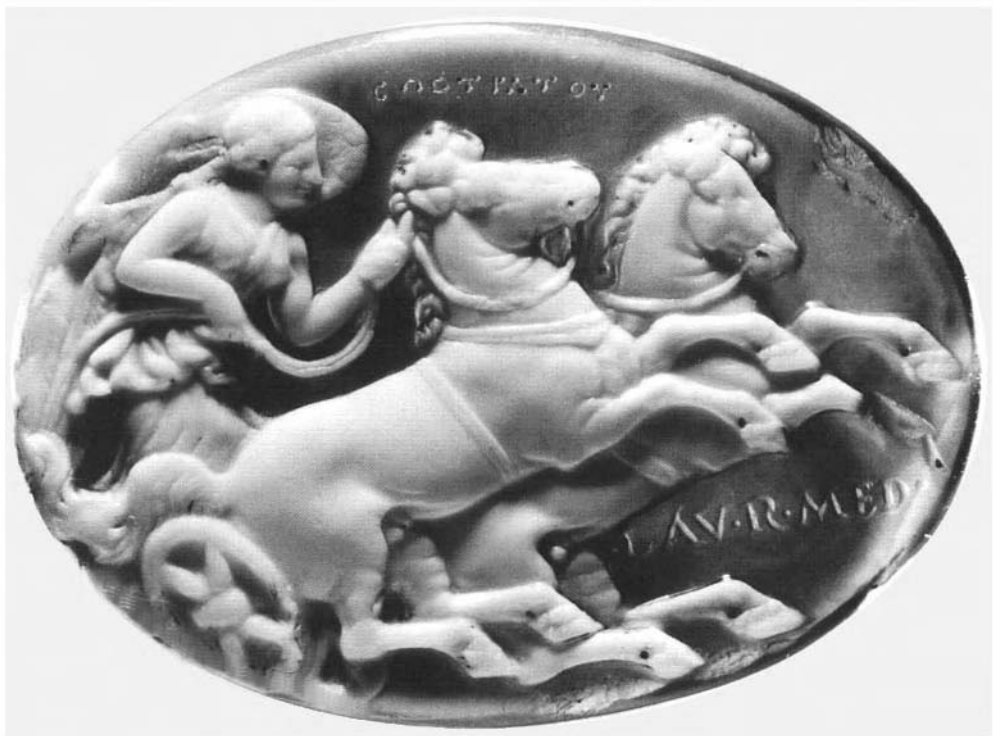


Figure 5. (Ames-Lewis). Roman, second century AD? *Nike riding a Biga*, cameo. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. Photo: Foto Pedicini.

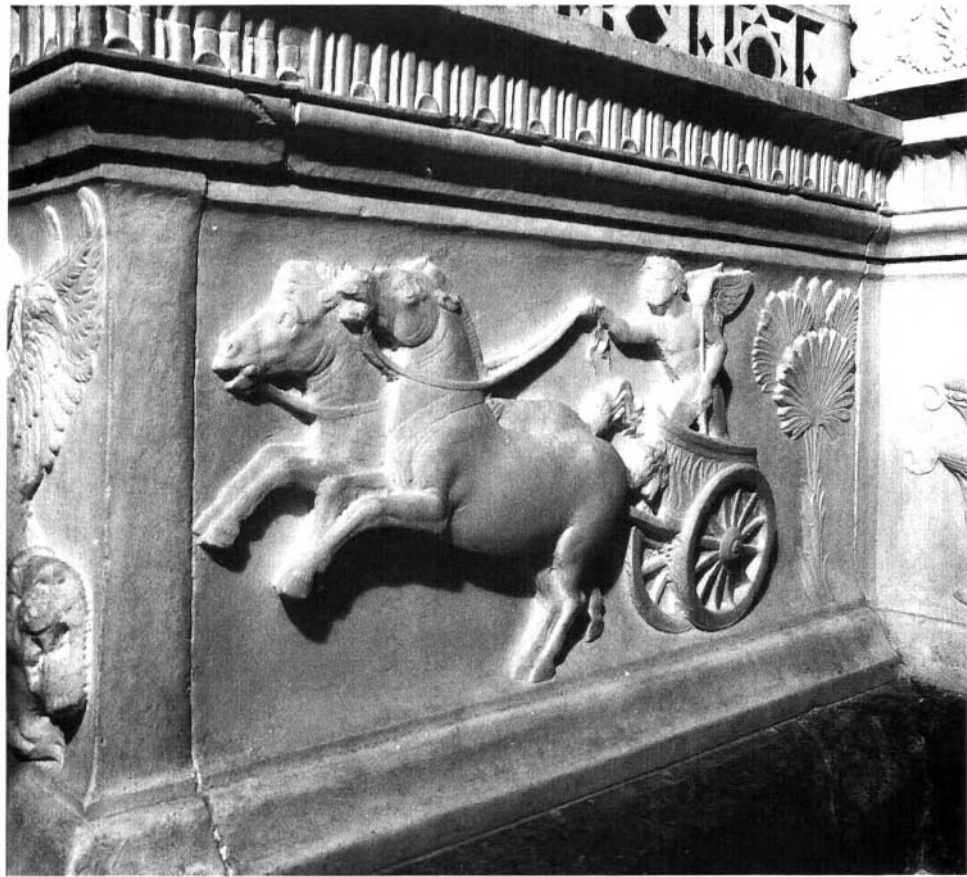


Figure 6. (Ames-Lewis). Antonio Rossellino and assistants, *Tomb of the Cardinal of Portugal*, detail: the 'Chariot of the Soul'. Florence, S. Miniato al Monte, Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal. Photo: Soprintendenza B.A.A., Florence.



Figure 7. (Ames-Lewis). Donatello, *Bust of a Youth*, detail, medallion with the 'Chariot of the Soul'. Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello. Photo: Foto Rabatti.



Figure 8. (Ames-Lewis). Donatello, *Bust of a Youth*. Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello. Photo: Foto Rabatti.



Figure 9. (Ames-Lewis). Donatello, *David*. Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello.
Photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence.

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